

THE DAYS OF THE APOSTLES

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PREFACE

THE Acts of the Apostles bears an unfortunate title, since it does not contain the life-story of the Twelve Apostles. Most of them are never mentioned at all.

St. Peter and St. John, who appear in the opening chapters, soon drop out of the story; and their after-life and work, as well as their death, have to be gathered from tradition and the history of the Early Church. Nor is it entirely a life of St. Paul, although after chapter xii. it is his astonishing work among the Gentiles that fills its pages. What, then, is its aim and purpose?

Surely throughout it is the story of the spread of Christ's kingdom, the story of the witness for Christ "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

And what a wonderful provision for the spread of the Gospel was the universal dominion of Rome! The great conquests of Rome, made just before Christ's birth, had been consolidated during His

PREFACE

life. Nation after nation had fallen before their conquering legions; Roman law and order had been forced on all the subject races, the Roman language learnt by millions of conquered people and captive slaves. Roman roads stretched like the spokes of a gigantic wheel outwards from the city on the Tiber; Roman swords and Roman justice kept peace to the uttermost parts of the Empire. It was the special time chosen by God, prepared by the Hand that guides the destinies of nations to serve His own loving purposes.

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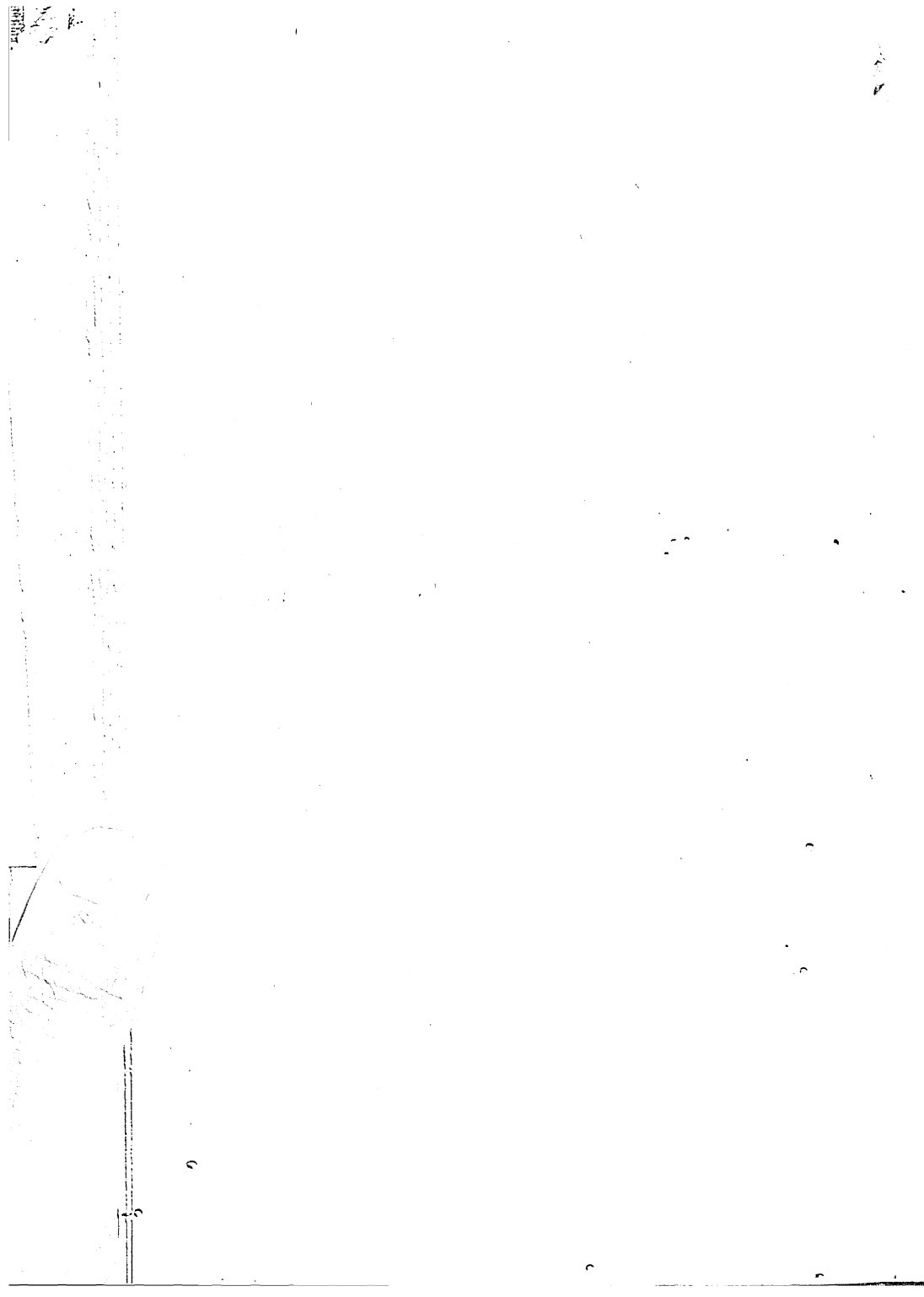
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IN THE DAYS OF THE APOSTLES

CHAPTER I

THE DAYS OF WAITING

JESUS was gone. The most wonderful life that has ever been lived on earth was ended, and the Lord of all Life had returned to His Father. The disciples had seen the wonder of the Ascension—the Master taken away from them as Elijah of old was taken from his disciple Elisha. But not with a whirlwind and chariots of fire. Gradually, gently, the Saviour had been drawn away from His adoring followers, whose eyes had strained to catch the last glimpse of the form they loved so dearly till He was hidden from their sight. Never again on this earth would they hear His loving words, never see His quiet smile or thrill to His words of encouragement or rebuke. They had now to stand alone, to show what they were worth individually, and how much they had really grasped of Christ's teaching and example. Just as the day comes for each one of

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us, when, school-days ended, we have to face life's battle and shoulder our own responsibilities ; so now the disciples were on the margin of a new life, a life without the visible presence of the Master. Yet they were not to be alone.

Jesus had spoken of a promise ; an amazing gift—the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. It is doubtful if any of them understood what that gift would be. How could they ? But they hoped that in some mysterious way it would bring back their Friend into their hearts, so that the promise He had given them of being always with them would be no empty words, but a glorious reality.

The last question they had asked Jesus must have shown Him how little they yet understood the nature of His Kingdom.

“ Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel ? ” they had questioned. It was the longing of all Jewish hearts, hidden and suppressed through years of oppression and subjection, but burning ever stronger and fiercer as the years passed by. National freedom ! an earthly kingdom such as King David had established.

Jesus did not even try to set right the mistake the disciples were making. When the great gift arrived they would understand that, and many things beside.

“ It is expedient for you that I go away,” He had told them.

THE DAYS OF WAITING

He might have told them that they would love Him better, understand Him better and serve Him better when He was gone. Theirs was not the perfect love yet, the love that rises above all personal fears and doubts. No, they had all forsaken Him and fled.

We sometimes think how happy we should have been if we could have lived in the actual daily presence of the Master, but we forget how few were those who believed in the Saviour of the world while He walked this earth, compared with the numbers that joined the Church after His Ascension.

Let us be thankful that we live when we do, for the eye of faith is keener far than earthly sight, the heart more quick to hear than outward ears. The sick woman in the crowd had to wait till Jesus passed by to touch the hem of His garment; we can touch Him with the hands of faith and love at any moment, wherever we chance to be.

So Jesus had departed and left His disciples to walk by faith and not by sight, and now they were waiting in patient yet certain hope, all His nearest and dearest gathered together into one loving family of about a hundred and twenty souls.

We are told of only one event that happened during those ten quiet days of obedient waiting, the choosing of a twelfth Apostle to fill the gap left in their number by Judas' death. Whether our Lord had suggested this new appointment is not

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clear. From the story in the Acts the idea seems to have originated with Peter, who was already proving himself a leader of men.

The idea found favour with the others, and two candidates were put forward who fulfilled Peter's conditions, for both had been disciples of our Lord from the very commencement to the end of His ministry. It is nice to think that these two men, Joseph Barsabas and Matthias, were not the only ones who, unknown to us by name in the Gospel history, had been faithful followers of Jesus. Probably both these men had gone forth with the seventy, preparing the Saviour's way as heralds going before a king, and had returned with joy to recount that even "the devils were subject unto them." The choice between the two was made by lot, the simplest and most usual method adopted when absolute fairness was demanded; God's guidance being first implored so that the lot might fall on the right person.

Of Matthias, God's choice, we know no more than the mere fact of his being joined to the Apostles' company, but the surname Barsabas comes once more into the Bible story. We find that (Acts xv. 22) Judas Barsabas was chosen with Silas to take important letters to Antioch from Jerusalem, where they were both chief men among the brethren.

CHAPTER II

THE DAY OF THE GIFT

DAY by day had passed in patient waiting for God's good time, and now the tenth day had dawned. It was a Festival of the Jewish Church, one of the three Feasts set apart by God in the days of Moses to be kept by the children of Israel. The day of Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks as it was known in Old Testament times, was the Feast of the First-fruits, when the first early crops of grain were ripening for the scythe, and the figs and grapes were hanging ripe in the more sheltered valleys, and on the sunniest walls. It was a day when the Temple Courts would have been thronged with busy worshippers, bringing their free-will offerings to God.

It is quite likely that the Disciple band had all been to the Temple earlier in the morning, for it was about nine o'clock, and the day was fully come when the great Gift was bestowed. The one hundred and twenty were all sitting together in the house where they were accustomed to assemble,

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talking, no doubt, of Him whom they missed so sorely.

Suddenly there was a sound of a tremendous hurricane of wind. The noise literally filled the house, and hushed to silence and frightened wonder and awed expectation the company assembled there. Then, above the brightness of the eastern sunlight, there shone upon each head a brilliance like flames of fire; and with this visible sign of God's presence, into each heart there flooded a new strange happiness, a joy unspeakable, the wisdom of God and the power of God. The Gift had come indeed!

God's Spirit took such possession of them that they became His mouthpiece, speaking languages they had never learnt or even heard spoken.

The news of this marvel spread rapidly, and the multitude hurried to find out the truth of the rumour for themselves. Jews from all over the world were in the crowd collected at Jerusalem that day. Jews whose homes were far away in the beautiful islands of Crete and Cyprus, or farther still in the trading cities of Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egypt or Asia Minor. Men of all pursuits and ranks jostled each other in the narrow streets as they poured towards the house where the wonder had occurred. Many had lived so long in foreign countries that the language of their place of exile was more familiar to them than their native



THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

"There shone upon each head a brilliance like flames of fire."

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Hebrew tongue, yet one and all were bound to each other by the ties of race and religion, ties which have withstood centuries of dispersion and exile.

By the time the crowd reached the disciples' meeting-place the house was empty, for the disciples were now in the street. Fear had left them—the fear that after the Crucifixion had made them meet in secret, behind locked doors—for perfect love always casts out fear, both then and now and till the end of time.

“What does it all mean?” the crowd whispered awestruck together. “These men, we can see from their faces and dress, are poor folk from Galilee. How can such as these know all our languages? Are they all drunk, do you think, so early in the day? What are we to think?”

It was Peter who first caught the word “drunken,” and gathering the eleven Apostles round him, he addressed the people. It was the first Christian sermon, and as we read the short summary of it in the Acts we seem to see the scene. The Twelve above the crowd, their faces transfigured with joy and wonder and love; the gaping multitude below, bewildered, curious, amused or scoffing according to their mood, but all hushed to silence by the flashing eyes, the ringing voice, the immense conviction of the speaker.

“Your wicked hands have killed the Saviour,”

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he told them, "the Man who raised the dead and healed the sick, who walked the waters and who fed the multitudes. But He has risen, He has ascended, and this that you see and hear is but His promised Gift sent down from the Throne on high. We disciples of His know, we have seen, and we bear witness that all this is true, and that the same Jesus whom you crucified is made by God your Master and your King."

Three thousand of that vast gathering were so touched to the heart by Peter's words that they received baptism at the hands of the Apostles then and there.

The days that followed were days of absolute sunshine and happiness. Clouds of persecution and hate and opposition were going to arise very, very soon ; but God gave the disciples these weeks of respite, in which the faith of the new members of the Church was strengthened, and many others daily joined the rapidly increasing band of believers. The Apostles wrought many miracles, and the populace for the time viewed the movement with favour. With thankful joy the disciples gave themselves up to the spreading of Christ's Kingdom. Never again would they mistake that kingdom for an earthly dominion. The Holy Spirit had taught them the Saviour's meaning at last. Still there is no doubt that the Church of that day expected our Lord's return

THE DAY OF THE GIFT

very speedily, though Jesus Himself had told them, "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons."

And here at the very commencement of Christianity we learn of four things regularly done by the whole Church.

They all kept faithfully to the teaching of the Apostles.

They all gathered together in friendly intercourse.

They all partook daily of the bread and wine in the great feast of the remembrance of Christ.

And they all joined in a regular service of prayer.

The form of these services was probably very simple. In the last forty days of His stay amongst them, Jesus may have given the Apostles broad rules for their guidance in these matters, as they talked together of the things belonging to the Kingdom. If He did, we know from all His sayings that it would have been no fixed detail of ritual and strict observances, but broad suggestions to guide them to a worship that was to be one of the spirit and not of the letter.

CHAPTER III

THE HELPLESS CRIPPLE HEALED

JESUS had said to His disciples, "And greater things (miracles) than these shall ye do, because I go unto My Father."

And now they were to learn the absolute truth of our Lord's words. It was nearing three o'clock one day when Peter and John walked together to the Temple for the afternoon service. Jerusalem, then as now, was the resort of beggars of all descriptions who displayed their infirmities and diseases to arouse the compassion of the passers-by. They loitered by the wayside, they sat outside the city gates, they thronged the approaches to the Temple. Many of them were well known to the townsfolk from their always occupying the same corner or post, and probably had their regular supporters among the passers-by.

Among these latter was a poor cripple.

Day by day his friends or relations carried him through the outer uncovered Court of the Gentiles to the shelter of the Beautiful Gate of the

THE HELPLESS CRIPPLE HEALED

Temple, where, protected from the fierce blaze of the sun, he lay patiently begging for charity from those who came to worship. Bitter experience had taught him to notice the expression on the faces of those who came and went, and to judge where his appeal was likely to succeed and where to fail. Unlike many of the beggars who crowded the Temple Courts, and who made some physical deformity an excuse for idleness, this man was utterly helpless. From birth, over forty years ago, he had been a cripple, and his muscles and joints, unused for so long a time, had shrunk and shrivelled into piteous contortion. A case for pity, if ever there were one.

To-day something about Peter and John as they approached the gateway caught the beggar's attention. It was not their dress. Men dressed like these he did not, as a rule, trouble to accost; they were obviously poor, with only some small coin about them for the customary Temple offering. But the expression on their faces made his pulses beat, and an unaccountable hope leap in his heart.

For Peter's face was aglow with joy and fearlessness, and John's with a shining love that changed to tender compassion as he caught sight of the sufferer gazing at them so intently.

"Sirs, for pity," the man cried, raising the usual beggar's whine.

Peter's glance dropped to the cripple on the

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pavement, and for a few breathless seconds he stood looking at him with an intentness that seemed to pierce through to the man's very soul.

Then he said abruptly, "Look on us."

The man was already looking from one to the other in eager expectancy. But the next words that came must have damped his rising hopes.

"Silver and gold have I none," Peter said clearly; then with a change of tone he added with bold decision, "but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."

Peter's absolute certainty passed to the man at his feet; the Apostle's outstretched hand was eagerly seized, and the miracle was wrought. The shrunken shrivelled limbs received strength and power, and the man stood and walked and leapt and ran.

Think for a moment of the time it takes a baby to balance itself on its legs, and with how many a tumble and abrupt sitting-down it attains the power of motion. This man had never walked, and yet the whole art was his in one moment of time by the power of that Name that is above every name; the Name of the Almighty Son of God.

Peter and John moved on, passing through the Gate Beautiful into the Women's Court. But the beggar was not thus to be left behind. Wonder

THE HELPLESS CRIPPLE HEALED

and intensest gratitude bound him to the Apostles' side, and if ever real praise ascended from that sacred place to the Throne on high, it came in bursts of outspoken joy from the lips of the former cripple. The other worshippers looked round, shocked at such unseemly noise, but when they recognized who it was who was making this disturbance, they crowded round him with eager questions. The beggar pointed out his healers, and the crowd turned their attention to the Apostles. It was a splendid opportunity for Peter, and he made the most of it.

Anxious to avoid a disturbance in one of the inner Courts of the Temple, he drew the curious and wondering throng out through the Beautiful Gate to Solomon's Porch, which was rather a covered arcade than what we now understand by the word "porch," and there his eager words found utterance.

"Why do you wonder," he cried, "as though we had made this man to walk by our own power or goodness? Jesus, whom you delivered up to Pilate, whose death you insisted on when Pilate wished to let Him go, whom you denied, whom you killed, whom God raised from the dead; that Jesus has made this man sound and well by the power of faith in His name. And now, my brothers, I know that you acted thus in ignorance; therefore repent, that your sins may be forgiven."

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The twofold result of this bold speech, delivered in the very stronghold of Jesus' most violent enemies, was what might have been expected—a tremendous increase in the number of believers, and the speedy imprisonment of the two Apostles.

The ever-increasing throng round the speaker drew the attention of the Temple authorities, quick to note any excitement or gathering that might bring trouble in its wake. What they heard of Peter's speech alarmed them still more. They broke through the crowd and carried off the speakers, leaving the people to disperse slowly, discussing the wonder as they went, and the cripple to walk home for the first time in his life. What a home-coming that must have been! Wonder, questions, tears, laughter, explanations, joy and gratitude all overflowing in that humble home. It is hard even to picture it.

Next morning Peter and John were brought before the Temple Court of law. The High Priest with his relations and friends, the rulers, elders and scribes had collected to try to stamp out this growing belief in Jesus. How strange they must have thought it, that Jesus, departed from the earth, was giving them more trouble than ever He had done in His lifetime! They had thought by crucifying the Master to reduce His followers to absolute insignificance; but behold they were

THE HELPLESS CRIPPLE HEALED

now more numerous, more assertive, more recklessly fearless than they had ever been.

Once again cowardly fear of the populace tied the hands of the Council. Love and gratitude had brought the healed beggar to stand beside the accused Apostles, and in his presence there was no denying the miracle, so they had to confine themselves to threats. "We forbid you to preach or teach any more in the name of Jesus," they commanded, "and if you persist we shall have to take steps to stop you."

If they expected to frighten the Apostles into silence, they were disappointed, for Peter's reply left them in no doubt.

"Judge," he said, "you who are set to judge between opposing parties. God tells us to speak, you tell us to be silent. Whose authority do you consider the greater, God's or your own?"

Then, as the Council hesitated, he continued boldly, "As for us, we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard."

Years and years before, Balaam, the faithless prophet of God, had used the same argument to the King who had bribed him to curse Israel. "What the Lord saith, that must I speak," he had told Balak.

Inwardly raging, but powerless at present to punish, the Council let the Apostles go; and these hurried at once to their own company to tell them

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all that had passed. And there, kneeling in the upper room, which seems to have been their usual meeting-place since the Lord's Ascension, they thanked God, and prayed for strength and courage to speak His word whatever the danger, whatever the consequences.

And God granted them a clear and immediate answer to their prayer. The room was shaken and a fresh inrush of the Holy Spirit was poured into their hearts.

CHAPTER IV

THE FEARFUL PUNISHMENT OF DECEIT

THE band of disciples at Jerusalem had now grown from about one hundred and twenty to some thousands, and the Apostles were faced with a new problem. How were they to provide for the wants of the needy among them, for many of the believers were poor men and women?

Not that poverty was a new thing to the disciples of Jesus.

The foxes could creep into their holes, and the birds fly back to their nests when the evening shadows fell, but often and often the disciples and their Master had had nowhere to lay their heads—nowhere but the bare earth or the harder stone of some cave-floor. And as with shelter, so with food. They were content to eat the bread of charity, for that was the Lord's will. He sent the Twelve Apostles out without money and without food to preach His kingdom and prepare His way, and later on the seventy disciples were expressly told to go equally unprovided for, for "the labourer

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is worthy of his hire." And not one of them starved.

In that land of hospitality they had always found some one to provide for their wants. No, poverty had no terrors for the Apostles while Jesus was with them. But it is one thing to obtain food for a few, and quite another to provide for a multitude, and this amazing growth of the Church made the question of means a very serious one.

The generosity of the richer converts solved the problem for the time being. They sold their land and houses and all their possessions, and brought the money to the Apostles to be used by them for the good of all. We read, "They had all things common."

It was an attempt at Christian Socialism.

Now this was clearly a plan that could not last. However large a sum of money you may have in your purse, it must all be spent one day, unless constantly replenished from other sources; and later on we shall see what a burden the extreme poverty of the Jerusalem Christians was to the rest of the Church. Another thing made matters worse than they would have been. These early disciples were so certain of their Lord's speedy return that to a large extent they had given up their work and employment, so eager were they to spend all their time in the spreading of His kingdom.

That they made a mistake we know, but who

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can blame their unselfish devotion and love? Better, far better to make a mistake like this, than live a life of selfishness and pleasure-seeking.

Among those who parted with all his worldly possessions at this time was Joses of Cyprus, whom we know best by his beautiful surname of Barnabas, the son of consolation. His action won him the love and gratitude of the company, as was but natural, although Barnabas had not done it with a view of obtaining praise.

Man is apt to judge of all actions by their outward appearance only, but God has quite a different method. He looks straight through the deed into the man's heart, and there he reads the motive that lies behind every action, and traces the first germ of evil through every stage of growth till it springs to light full-grown in some terrible sin. It is well to remember this in the sad story of deliberately planned wrong-doing that we come to now.

A certain man named Ananias, eager to gain the credit of such generosity as that of Barnabas, sold a possession, meaning probably to do as the others had done, and bring all the money obtained by the sale to the Apostles. But when the gold and silver were actually in his hands his heart failed him. It seemed so great a sum to give, such an unnecessary self-sacrifice. What could be easier than to give part of the price as if it were the whole,

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and keep the rest for the use of himself and his wife, Sapphira? He talked the matter over with her, and she agreed to the scheme. The Apostles would never know how much had been paid for the land. Nobody knew but themselves and the man to whom they had sold it, and him they could easily bind over to secrecy. Yes, it seemed an excellent plan, and one bound to succeed. They would gain the praise and gratitude of the others and nobody would be any the wiser. And neither of them thought of the eye that sees "every secret thing whether it be good or whether it be evil."

So Ananias started out, prepared to act a lie, promising to return home speedily and tell Sapphira how splendidly all had gone. I wonder if his heart failed him at all as he walked along the streets? If it did, he must have quieted his conscience by saying that it was too late to alter his decision now, for there was no hesitation in his manner as he entered the meeting-room, and carried the money across to lay it at the Apostles' feet.

"What is this money, Ananias?"

"It is the price of the possession I have just sold for the public good."

"Is this the whole price you obtained by the sale?"

"Yes, that is the full amount."

And then in a flash of Divine inspiration Peter knew that the man was lying.

THE FEARFUL PUNISHMENT OF DECEIT

“Ananias,” he said sternly, “why has Satan filled your heart to tell this lie to God? The land was your own to sell or not exactly as you liked. There was no need for you to part with it unless you wished, and even when it was sold, the money was still yours to give or to keep. Why did you plan this wickedness in your heart? It is God, not man, that you have tried to deceive.”

At those awful words of rebuke, Ananias tottered and fell dead at the Apostle's feet, where his wretched money still lay untouched.

The younger men of the congregation picked him up and carried him out to his burial, unhonoured and unmourned.

At home, Sapphira waited impatiently for her husband's return, and as the hours passed a vague feeling of anxiety and disquiet crept into her mind. What could be keeping her husband all this time? At last she could bear the suspense no longer. So putting on her outer wraps she hurried through the streets to the meeting-place of the Christian Church. She had barely had time to cast an anxious glance around for her husband, when Peter addressed her.

“Tell me, did you sell the land for so much?” mentioning the sum brought by Ananias so shortly before.

Did she notice the grave earnestness of the Apostle's tone? Was she aware of the feeling of

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tension in the room, and the anxious glances of the bystanders? If so, it did not shake her determination to stand by her husband in the plan they had concocted together, for she seems to have answered without hesitation:

“Yes, that was the sum.”

Her guilt was as great as that of Ananias, and she shared the same fate. She was buried beside her husband, a fearful warning to all those who try to deceive God.

CHAPTER V

THE IMPRISONMENT OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES

SOLOMON'S Porch was chosen by Peter as a suitable place for preaching the risen Saviour. The streets of Jerusalem were too narrow for a large crowd to assemble without stopping the traffic; but from the shelter of Solomon's Arcade, the crowd if great could spread into the large enclosure known as the Court of the Gentiles, and there Peter and the Eleven healed the sick, cast out devils, and preached Jesus and the Resurrection. It was this last great and glorious fact that was the keynote of all their teaching.

Most of the people who thronged to hear them had seen or heard of Jesus of Nazareth. Many must have seen Him at His trial or passing along the streets to His crucifixion. Some may actually have watched Him die; but the wonderful facts of the Resurrection and Ascension were new to them.

Jesus had shown Himself to so few after He rose from the dead, that vague rumours, speedily

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and angrily contradicted by the Priests and Pharisees, were all that the townsfolk of Jerusalem had heard. And now they learnt for the first time every detail of that first Easter morning, and "multitudes both of men and women" believed. But the rich and powerful still held aloof, cowardly fear holding them back from joining the band of disciples, even though their hearts cried out as the centurion at Calvary had done, "Surely this was the Son of God." They dared not face the earthly consequences, the jeers and persecutions, the loss and shame; and so they missed the blessings and the unearthly happiness of those who are friends with Jesus.

It was Peter who was always the chief speaker, and faith in his power rose to such a height that the mere fact of his shadow resting on the sick as he passed along the streets was enough to bring healing to their suffering bodies. From Jerusalem the great news spread to the villages and towns around, and multitudes carrying their sick poured daily along the roads leading to the capital; and "they were healed every one."

But such a public stir and excitement was sure to bring trouble. The High Priest and his friends were both angry and jealous, angry that their threats to Peter and John had had no effect, and jealous of any one having an influence over the people greater than their own. The party of the

IMPRISONMENT OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Sadducees was still uppermost, and these men taught that there is no life after this earthly one. Thus the preaching of the Resurrection from the dead, and the life after death, was in direct contradiction of their favourite belief.

With such bitter enemies against them the Apostles were not likely to be left long in peace. This time all twelve of them were caught, and put into the common prison where thieves and murderers were kept. We know that they rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer any hardship or suffering for His Name's sake, but this time it was not God's will that their enemies should triumph over them. Like Jesus, who passed safely through the perils of His three years' ministry, their time was not *yet* come. Come it would and did, for each one of them, except John, laid down his life for his Master ; but not till their work had been gloriously accomplished, the Christian Church settled and established, and their successors trained to take their place and carry on their ministry.

Very simply we are told of the Apostles' wonderful deliverance. In the night the Angel of the Lord opened the prison gates and led them out. Then, in the freedom of the empty streets, he gave them God's message.

"Go back," he said, "to the Temple, and continue preaching to the people."

Joyfully the Apostles obeyed, certain that the

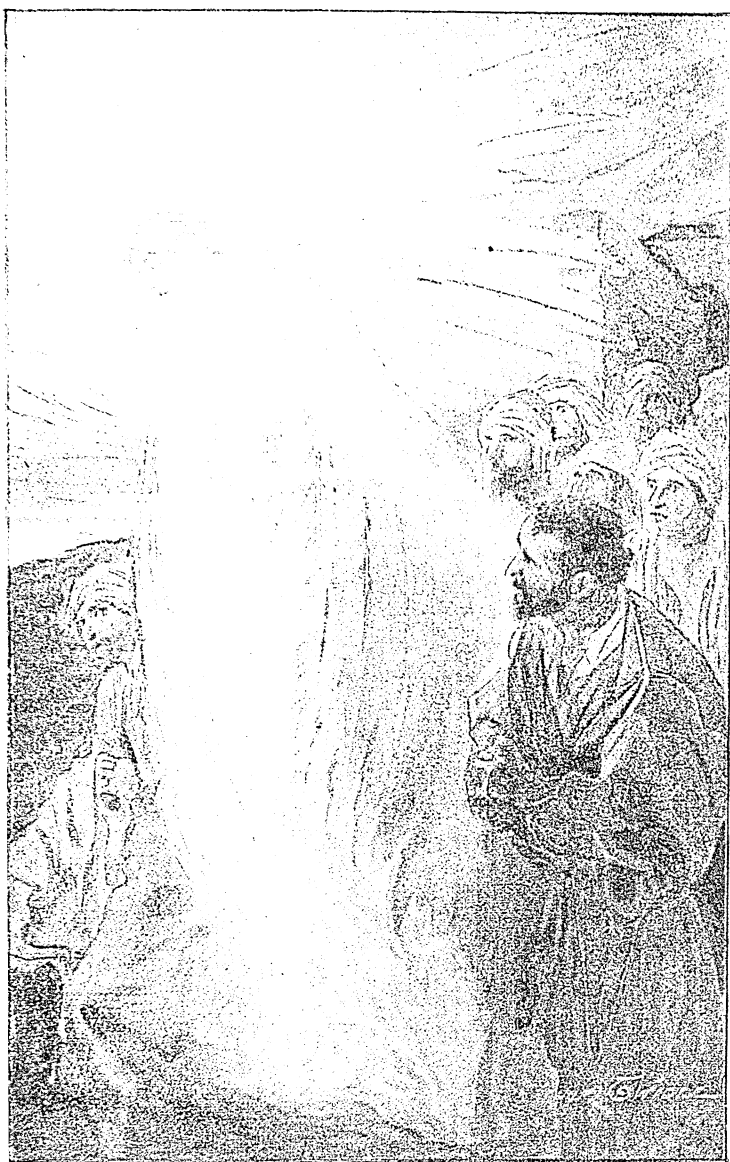
IN THE DAYS OF THE APOSTLES

Lord of the Angels both could and would protect them. Very early next morning they were at their accustomed post, teaching and talking to all those who would stay to listen.

Meanwhile, the Priests had called the Council together, and were waiting impatiently in the Council-chamber for the return of the officers and soldiers whom they had sent to the prison to fetch the Apostles. Presently these hurried in with extraordinary news. The prison they had found as usual; the warders standing on guard outside the doors, the doors themselves all securely locked and barred, but within the dungeon itself not a sign of the Twelve. How, or by what means, they had escaped none knew.

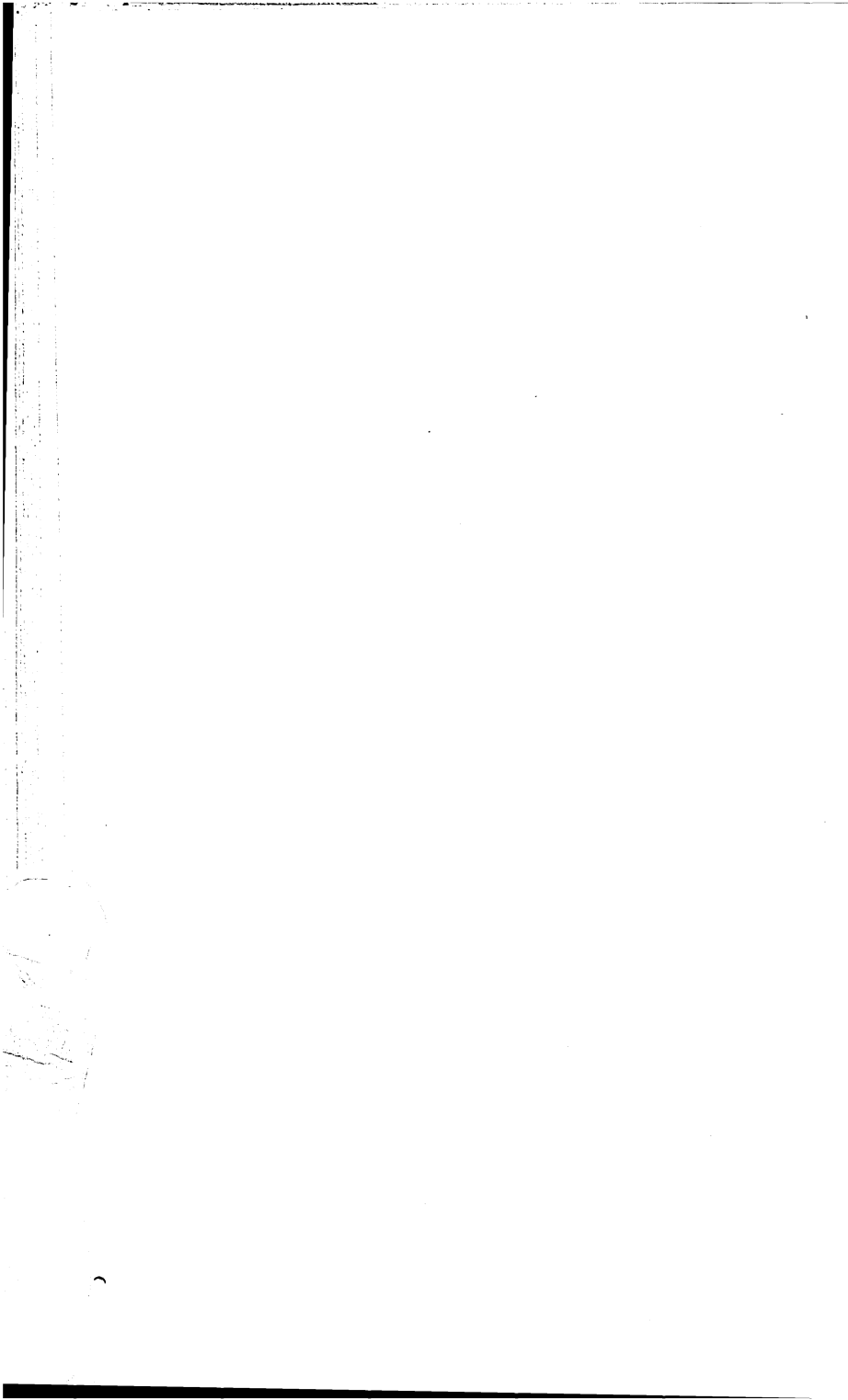
The astonished Sanhedrin questioned and cross-questioned in vain, till somebody came running with the news that the Apostles were back in their usual place teaching the people.

It was one thing to seize the Apostles at the close of the day when the Temple courts were almost empty; but now a large crowd had collected round them who would resent any rough handling of the men who had healed their sick. Very carefully, therefore, and with no show of violence, did the captain and soldiers fetch the Twelve to the Council-room. They were promptly accused of disobeying the High Priest's former command not to teach in the name of Jesus, but Peter reminded



THE APOSTLES DELIVERED FROM PRISON.

"The angel of the Lord opened the prison gates and led them out."



IMPRISONMENT OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES

them again that God's command was the guide of their actions. If God's law and man's law clash, the Christian has no choice but to follow the former, whatever the consequence to himself may be.

This bold refusal to obey enraged the judges, and they tried to find some pretext for killing the Apostles. Things might have gone badly for the prisoners if it had not been for the influence of one man.

Sitting in the Sanhedrin that day was Gamaliel, a celebrated teacher of the Jewish law, whose wise judgments, broad sympathies and calm decisions have come down to us in the history of that time. By his advice the Apostles were removed from the room for a while, and then he quietly addressed the angry assembly.

"Take care what you do to these men," he urged. "There have, as you know, been several risings lately among the people. Leaders have arisen such as Theudas and Judas of Galilee who have for a time gained followers, only to be dispersed and scattered in a very short time. My advice to you is—leave these men alone, for it is certain that if their teaching is false, it will speedily come to nothing by itself; but if their power and their words *are* from God, nothing you can do can check or hinder them, and in that case you may find yourselves arrayed in battle against God."

IN THE DAYS OF THE APOSTLES

The weight of Gamaliel's personality and the soundness of his argument impressed the Council. They decided on a milder form of punishment. As these men had openly flouted their orders, they should be openly beaten for the sake of example.

The Apostles were recalled and the sentence carried out with due formality. Then they were set free with another warning.

And now perhaps you will ask, Why did God allow the Apostles to be beaten? He had sent His angel to bring them out of prison. He had put into the mouth of wise Gamaliel the words that had saved their lives, could He not equally have saved them from the stripes?

Yes, undoubtedly He could have, had it been His will. We do not know the reason of all God's dealings here. "Hereafter" we shall know and understand.

But this we do know.

Jesus Himself was made perfect by suffering, therefore suffering forms part of God's plan for the perfecting of His servants. The Apostles did not think it hard or unfair or unjust, or a sign that God had forsaken them. A thousand times No! They departed, we read, rejoicing at the honour of bearing shame and pain for His sake.

CHAPTER VI

STEPHEN, THE DEACON

THE Jerusalem Christians, you remember, had a common purse, out of which the daily wants of the whole company were provided. Many gathered regularly for meals at a common table ; but the old and infirm, the very busy and those who lived too far away, had either to send for their ration or have it taken to them. This entailed a tremendous amount of work and organization, and the Apostles found their time for preaching greatly reduced.

Squabbles and disputes arose, too, over the question of clothing, and the Apostles were finally accused of showing an unfair preference towards the widows of the Jews living in Judæa. The Grecian Christians complained bitterly of neglect.

Now, the Grecian Christians were *not* Greeks. They were as much Jews by race and blood as the Hebrews themselves. Jews of the Dispersion they were called ; Jews who for some reason or another had never returned with Nehemiah or

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Ezra to Judæa, but had been content to settle down in foreign lands. From time to time others had joined them in exile, either to escape persecution or better to earn a livelihood, and these had all learnt the Greek language as a necessity of their daily life and business. Gradually the Hebrew tongue was forgotten as the older generations died out; in fact so widely was this the case that more than two centuries before the birth of Christ the Old Testament had been translated into Greek for their use, the Grecian Empire being then still at the height of its glory.

The bad feeling between the Greek-speaking and Hebrew-speaking Jews rose to such a height that the Apostles talked the matter over among themselves, and decided on a remedy. They would appoint certain men from among their number, whose duty it should be to attend to the distribution of food and clothing and the keeping of the money accounts, setting them apart for this special service by a solemn laying-on of hands.

Now, the "Laying-on of hands" was a very ancient custom, as old as the days of Jacob and Moses, and was used for two purposes. It was used in the act of bestowing a blessing, and also when any one was being chosen and set apart for any special duty or office. It was a ceremony that the Apostles knew well, and what act more simple and more impressive?

STEPHEN, THE DEACON

The Apostles did not choose the seven Deacons themselves. They left the choice to the "brethren," and well and wisely did they select. Out of the seven, the first two only (Stephen and Philip) come into the story of the Acts, which is not a history of *all* the doings of the Apostles and their followers, but only of such as mark especially the spread of the Kingdom. That a Deacon's duty was not merely to distribute food and clothing is pretty certain. They probably had religious duties as well, such as the baptizing of newly made converts, and none of them were debarred from preaching if God's Spirit impelled them so to do.

In those early days of the Church, the witnessing for Jesus, was not left to isolated clergyman or missionary or parish worker; every one of the congregation felt compelled to pass on the glad news. Then, as now, all had not the power of moving vast crowds by their eloquence, but all possessed the ordinary gift of speech, and in cottage and farmstead, in market and street, eager tongues proclaimed the wonderful tidings of salvation.

As Stephen moved about among the poor of Jerusalem he must have seen many sad sights of sickness and distress, which filled his kind young heart with pity. Then one day he made a wonderful discovery. He found that God had granted to him also that marvellous gift of healing

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which the Apostles possessed. How and when he first knew the power that was in him we do not know, but we can imagine the adoring gratitude that swept through his heart and the rapturous joy with which he did "great wonders and miracles among the people"—a willing eager channel for God's power and God's love.

He did not confine himself to relieving distress alone, his preaching too seems to have been full of extraordinary power and wisdom. Certain it is that the Scribes and Priests hated him even more than they did the Apostles. It may have been that his superior education and wonderful knowledge of the Old Testament made his reasoning more convincing, so that they feared the effect his words might have on the more educated part of the populace. Already some of the Priests had joined the new religion (Acts vi. 7) and the Scribes and Elders were terrified and alarmed. In their rage they resorted to the same devices they had tried against Jesus. They set the wisest of their number to argue with Stephen, to question him, and prove him wrong before the multitude. But here they failed as they had failed before. The wisdom and learning of their wisest men could not stand against the wisdom of the Holy Spirit by whom Stephen spoke.

Their next trick was more deadly. They bribed men to go about among the people telling them

STEPHEN, THE DEACON

that they had heard Stephen speak against Moses and the Law and against the Temple.

The people of the East are not like the people of Britain. They are far more excitable, far more easily roused to anger or joy, far less likely to judge any matter calmly.

This trick succeeded. The people grew indignant, and Stephen was caught and brought before the Council.

The false witnesses were there, primed and ready with their accusations, which were all the more deadly because they were partly true.

“We have heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs [ceremonies] which Moses delivered us.”

True! The Temple was to be destroyed, and how utterly Jesus had foretold when He said, “There shall not one stone be left upon another.” But the destruction was to be wrought by Roman soldiers as a direct result of Jewish rebellion and sin. They themselves, and not Jesus or His followers, were to be the cause.

The second charge was also partly true.

Jesus had come “not to destroy but to fulfil” the Law of Moses.

All the sacrifices for sin had been but a looking forward to the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God for the sins of the whole world. The need for sacrifices was now past. That service of looking

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forward was to be dropped because its use was gone. A service of remembrance, of looking back, had already taken its place among the Disciple band. Day by day they met for the "breaking of bread," the service of Holy Communion, in obedience to our Lord's command, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

Stephen, standing before the Council, was called upon to answer these two charges; and as his judges watched the young manly figure with a face so calm, so gentle, so joyously fearless, they "saw his face as it had been that of an angel."

Stephen's speech is a very long one, and yet, of course, only a brief extract is given in the Acts. In it we see that he was trying not so much to defend himself as to prove Jesus the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. He goes back to the time of Abraham, when there was no tabernacle, no priesthood, no form of service. Sacrifices there had always been since the day of Adam's sin, but these were offered very simply without ceremony or any fixed form of prayer. Religion in Abraham's day consisted in a fervent faith in God's promise that one day the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, and in observing the Covenant of Circumcision. Stephen explains this clearly, so as to show that the law which God gave to Moses had not always been necessary; the Israelites had no Tabernacle in Egypt, nor had the Jewish exiles

STEPHEN, THE DEACON

any Temple in Babylon, yet in neither place had God forsaken His people, nor was religion dead among them. No, God does not dwell in temples made with hands; the whole expanse of Heaven is His throne, and earth His footstool.

The law and the prophets all pointed to Jesus, and Him the Council had rejected, betrayed and murdered.

"You have indeed received the law you value so much," Stephen finished, "but you have not kept it."

Bold brave words these to the proudest, most self-satisfied body of men in the world.

They were "cut to the heart," we read, not in sorrow and repentance, but in anger, indignation and injured pride. Stephen, looking upwards, saw not their angry faces but a vision.

"Behold," he cried, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."

Oh, blessed glimpse of heaven! With that wonderful sight before him, what mattered to Stephen what followed?

With a yell of rage his enemies rushed on him. They dragged him roughly through the Temple Courts, and along the streets till the gateway in the outer wall was reached. Once outside, the deed was speedily accomplished. The false witnesses threw off their outer garments at the feet of

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a young man named Saul, and picked up stones to hurl. Like Jesus, Stephen commended his spirit to God ; and when he could no longer stand, he knelt and prayed, " Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

The first Christian martyr had indeed died nobly for his Lord.

CHAPTER VII

THE GOSPEL REACHES SAMARIA

STEPHEN'S death was only the commencement of trouble for the Church in Jerusalem. The persecution grew so intense that the Christians fled in all directions. Some, clinging to the hope of a speedy return to their homes, sought temporary refuge in the outlying villages and farms of Judæa. Some went farther afield. Phenice, Cyprus and Antioch all saw a fresh influx of Palestine Jews.

It looked as if the enemies of Christ had won a great victory. But God can turn seeming failure into success, and this persecution of the Church was a blessing in disguise. Left to themselves and convinced of Christ's speedy return, the tendency of the disciples would have been to keep together in the Holy City. Now they were forced to scatter. It was a distinct gain for the spread of the Kingdom, for everywhere that the disciples went they preached the glad news of salvation. Only the Apostles remained at their post, their

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popularity with the people perhaps protecting them for the time.

Philip the Deacon chose Samaria for his new home. His success there was so great that Peter and John were sent to visit the converts, and they prayed and laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. Now, among those who had believed as a result of Philip's preaching was a man named Simon, who had gained a great reputation in the town as a wizard. He was a man of great mental powers, which had been increased by education ; but instead of using his knowledge of medicine, astrology and natural laws for the good of mankind, he delighted in deceiving the ignorant by sorcery and incantations. His reputation as a sorcerer was profitable. Money poured in on him. He became a power in the place. Whether a man with such a twisted nature, and earning his livelihood by deception, could have been at all sincere in his belief in a crucified Saviour we cannot tell. All knowledge appealed to him, provided he could turn it to account, and there was one power of Philip's that he especially envied. Sedulously he followed the Deacon about from day to day, watching the miracles and healings that he wrought, and striving to find out how they were done.

Philip must have believed Simon's conversion to have been genuine, or he would certainly not have baptized him, but there is a belief of the reason

THE GOSPEL REACHES SAMARIA

and the brain without any belief of the heart. "The devils also believe," we are told; they acknowledge Jesus to be divine, but the knowledge brings them no joy, only fear. We do not know for certain if Simon was among those who knelt before the two Apostles to receive the laying-on of hands; but this we do know, that if he did no gift of God's Holy Spirit followed the outward act. No, confirmation requires pure love and fervent faith on the part of the believer before God's wonderful gift can be received, and Simon had neither.

But he was quick to notice the visible effects of the receiving of the Holy Ghost on his fellow-townsmen. If only he could bestow this gift, what an increase of power, fame and wealth would be his! In his blind ignorance he came to Peter and John with money in his hands.

"Sell me this power of yours, so that I too shall be able to lay my hands on others and give them the Holy Ghost."

Peter started back in horror from the bribe.

"Your money perish with you," he exclaimed vehemently, "because you have thought that God's gift can be bought with silver and gold. Repent of this wickedness and ask God to forgive you, for I see clearly that your heart is still full of evil."

This stern rebuke terrified Simon. These wonder-workers might cast some fearful spell upon

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him. Was there not some story of a man and his wife falling dead at this very Apostle's feet on account of some small deception they had practised?

"Pray for me," he cried, "that none of these things come upon me." The Bible does not tell us anything more about Simon Magus, but from contemporary history we learn that he was an enemy of the Church to the day of his death.

Peter and John only remained a few days in Samaria, and then returned to Jerusalem, preaching in many of the Samaritan villages as they journeyed along.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GOSPEL REACHES AFRICA

IT was not long after Peter and John had left Samaria that Philip was sent on a mysterious errand. God's angel came to him with this message:

"Arise and travel along the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert."

No reason was given, no time specified, no object hinted at. Philip must often have wondered as he travelled steadily southward what work God had ready for him. Jerusalem and Gaza lie many miles apart, and there are three roads by which the traveller can journey from one town to the other. The more southerly led through Hebron and then across mountain country westward till it dropped to the plain lying along the ancient Philistine coast-line.

Somewhere along that road surely must lie the desert of which the angel had spoken. I do not think Philip stopped to preach this time as he travelled. God's command was "go," and he pushed eagerly forward. He had passed Jerusalem, and the Holy City had been lost to sight for hours,

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when another and a very different traveller started along the desert road.

One of the three Jewish feasts had just been held, and from every gate returning worshippers were setting out on the homeward journey. Among them was a black man from Ethiopia ; a great man in his own country, for he was the favourite slave of the famous Queen Candace, and the trusted guardian of all her treasures. Either in his own country, or more likely whilst on some business for his royal mistress in foreign lands, he had met Jewish merchants or travellers, and had learnt from them of the one God, the Ruler and Maker of all things. From them, too, he had heard of Jerusalem, and of its wonderful Temple, and had obtained a copy of the Old Testament in Greek which he studied. I think it was with great difficulty that he had obtained leave to visit Jerusalem, for Queen Candace would not willingly have spared such a useful servant ; and now that the feast was over, he was in a hurry to be off.

The return journey was long, and lay for the greater part of the way over sandy wastes, where robbers lurked to attack the unprotected traveller. The Ethiopian, however, feared no marauding bandits. His slaves were sufficiently numerous and well-armed to resist attack, while his camels and horses were swift and sure. His chariot quickly out-distanced the slow-moving throng of foot-

THE GOSPEL REACHES AFRICA

passengers near the Holy City. A turn of the road, and the Temple roofs disappeared from sight. With a sigh the courtier fell back on thoughts that had been troubling him. Finally, he took from the folds of his dress his treasured copy of the sacred writings. Unrolling it with care he began to re-read that part of the prophecy of Isaiah which we find in the fifty-third chapter. As he read his face grew puzzled and dissatisfied at the strange account of suffering which it described.

A man despised, rejected, tried, condemned, killed, yet innocent of all ill, free from all offence—a man who suffered all this in silence, willingly bearing the sins and punishment of others! Such love and self-sacrifice was beyond the Ethiopian's understanding. Who was the man, anyway? And when had he lived? Somehow he felt that the answer to those two questions was of vital importance. He was reading the passage aloud, trying to find some clue to the mystery, when a voice beside him startled him to attention.

A young man was running along the road beside him, and the question that had roused the black man was an odd one.

“Do you understand what you are reading?”

Something in the eager face of the questioner impelled confidence.

“How can I unless somebody explain it to me? Do you know what it means?”

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There was not the slightest hesitation in Philip's answer, and the two men were soon seated side by side, both heads bent over the parchment. Then with eager words and burning heart Philip preached Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, Who had died for the sins of the whole world. Time passed unnoticed, for Philip had much to tell, the Ethiopian much to ask.

At last a wayside pool came in sight, and the eunuch cried out joyfully : " See, here is water ; what doth hinder me to be baptized ? " A quick command was given to the native driver, and the chariot was stopped. The two men got down, and there by the roadside, with only the astonished slaves as witnesses, Philip baptized the first African Christian.

From the pool the white man and the black climbed to the road again, and there, in the midst of words of encouragement, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly caught away Philip so that the Ethiopian saw him no more.

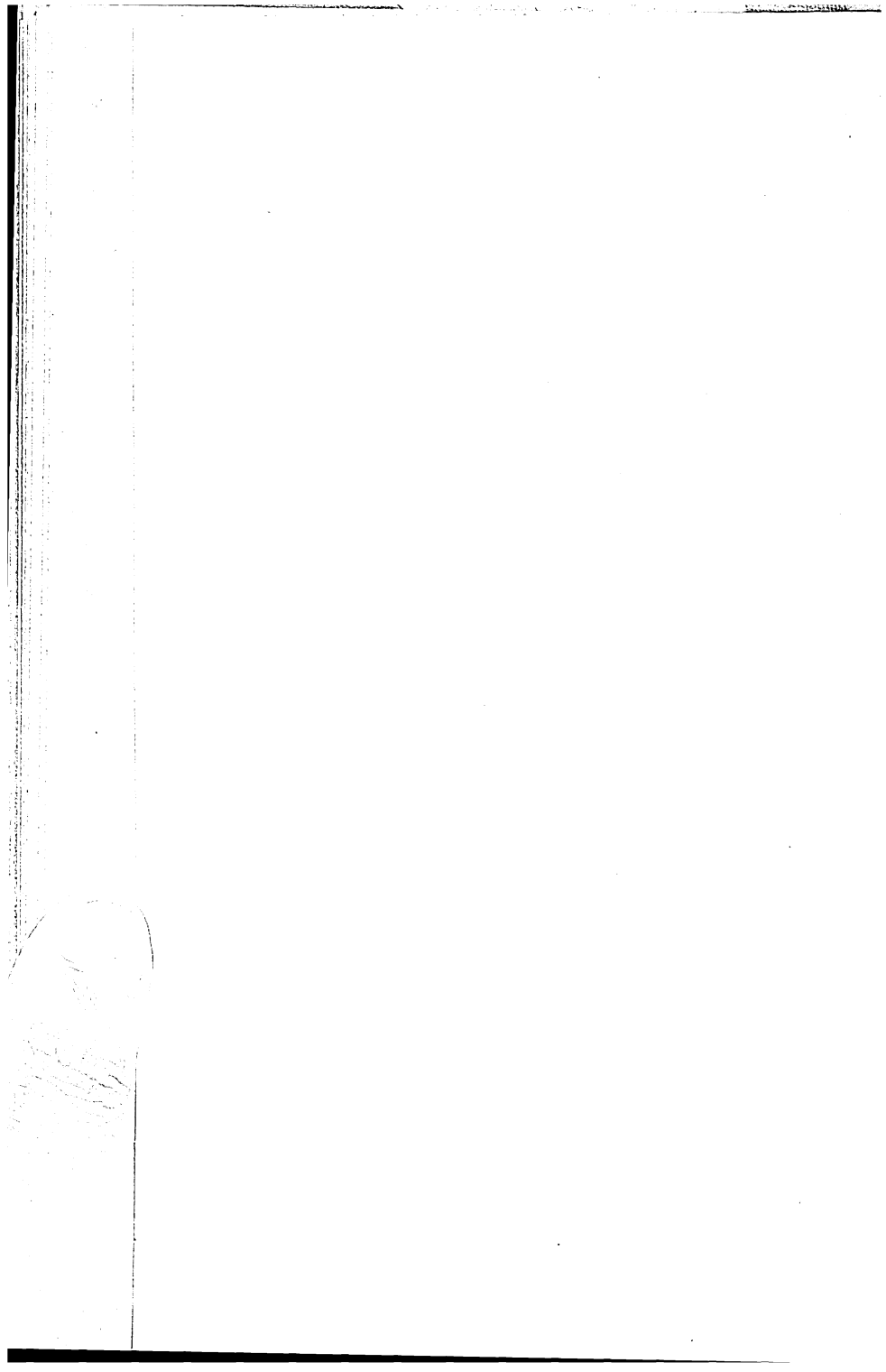
No longer did the journey back to his distant home seem long and wearisome. Joy and gratitude filled the treasurer's heart to overflowing, joy in his Saviour's love, and gratitude to God for having thought a black slave's doubts and difficulties worth all that care and thought.

We do not know if the Ethiopian ever again visited Palestine, or had any further intercourse



PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN.

"The two men were soon seated . . . both heads bent over the parchment."



THE GOSPEL REACHES AFRICA

with Jewish Christians, but of this we can surely be certain. Once back in Ethiopia he would preach Jesus Christ to the Court and to all those with whom he came in daily contact.

There is a tradition that Matthew later on took Ethiopia as the scene of his labours. If he indeed reached that distant country in the eunuch's lifetime we can easily picture the welcome he would have received.

But this much is solid fact.

Hundreds of years later, when white men penetrated Abyssinia (the modern name for Ethiopia), they found there, altered and perverted it is true, and darkened by lapse of time and contact with heathenism, traces of a belief in the one true God. How did it get there? And by whom was it planted? May it not have been the fruit of the seed sown by Philip's Ethiopian courtier?

* * * * *

Philip himself was next heard of at Azotus, the Ashdod of Philistine days. Moving northward along the coast road, he again reached the Samaritan country, settling eventually at Cæsarea. This important town had been practically made by Herod the Great, and was the seat of the Roman Governor, and the principal station for Roman troops. We find Philip still living here, with his daughters, when years later Paul passed through the town on his last visit to Jerusalem.

CHAPTER IX

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

I N the last chapter we found that God takes infinite trouble to bring one soul to Himself, but we must remember that each human being has a double value in God's sight. There is first the man's own individual worth. And secondly, there is his worth as an influence on others. Through the Ethiopian courtier God saw the Ethiopian people; through persecuting Saul of Tarsus, God saw the Gentile world.

Saul springs into the story of the Acts at Stephen's martyrdom, and we have to look to his letters to piece together a little of his former life.

Tarsus, his birthplace, was a large town lying on the Mediterranean sea-coast under the Taurus mountains, a busy seaport where Levantine traders and Phœnician sailors did a brisk carrying trade for Greek and Jewish merchants

Saul's father, he tells us, was a strict Pharisee, and brought his son up to the rigid observance of all Jewish laws and ceremonies. Of his mother

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we hear no word. She probably died while he was still young, for there seems to have been an utter lack of the softer influences of home in his upbringing. Saul's sister is mentioned only once (Acts xxiii. 16) as living in Jerusalem. She may have been a good deal the elder of the two, and if so, in those days of early marriages, would have left her home before her influence could have been felt. We have no means of knowing whether she was much or little to her brother.

Little Saul went to school in Tarsus, being taken to and fro through the streets by a trusted slave of the household.

In after-life he remembers the firm grip of the old man's hand, which prevented many a loitering along the busy exciting streets. Later on he was sent to Jerusalem to continue his studies under the most famous teacher of the time, for Saul's father was ambitious for his son. If it was to his father that he owed his zeal for religion and his tenacity of purpose, it was to Gamaliel that he owed his clear power of reasoning and his love of truth.

We do not know where Saul was during the three wonderful years of Christ's ministry, but that he never saw the Saviour face to face during his lifetime we know from his own words. Perhaps he had by then returned to Tarsus or accepted some work far distant from Judæa. If Saul gave

IN THE DAYS OF THE APOSTLES

his vote for Stephen's death as a member of the Sanhedrin, he must have been a married man and a father at that time, since this was a rule for such membership. But in everything touching his private life Saul was most reticent, and we can only guess at the influences that went to make his character. Saul was absolutely sincere, absolutely genuine, and he had his own decided views. If the father was strict and rigid in his religious convictions, and willing to sacrifice everything to what he believed true, so was the son. Both were of the stuff of which martyrs are made.

Even the respect and reverence which Saul felt for his teacher Gamaliel did not prevent him from disagreeing with him. Gamaliel's former advice to the Sanhedrin, to let Christianity die out of itself by ignoring it, did not appeal to his pupil's impetuous and ardent nature. For one thing the policy had not answered. Christianity had not died out, far from it. Saul advised a rigorous system of repression. Death to the ringleaders! Exile and imprisonment to the rank and file! That would stamp it out.

It was whilst pursuing that system of his that he watched Stephen die. He saw it all. The serene courage of the martyr, the glowing faith, the freedom from all resentment against his executioners. Despite himself Saul was touched. Courage, faith, zeal, these were the qualities he

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most admired. Stephen's speech too, with its deep insight into the Old Testament Scriptures, must have awakened haunting doubts in the certainty of Saul's self-confidence. Was there something after all in this story of a crucified and risen Messiah? Could he and nine-tenths of his nation have made a hideous mistake? It was too awful an idea to contemplate. So Saul dismissed the pricks of conscience which threatened to destroy the whole fabric of his faith, and fell back on his policy of persecution. At the stoning of Stephen he was calm and dignified, now he became a very whirlwind of destruction. The Christians fled before him. In Jerusalem only the Apostles remained at their post, exempt for some reason from immediate danger.

But Saul was not satisfied. He intended to exterminate this heresy, and hearing that the new religion had reached Damascus, he set out for that distant town. With him he carried letters from the Chief Priest to the heads of the synagogues there, urging them to help the bearer in hounding down the Christian heretics.

But the very Jesus Whose followers he was seeking to destroy was both guarding His disciples at Damascus and seeking the misguided persecutor himself. He knew that Saul's earnestness and zeal, once enlisted in His service, would be the most effective instrument for the spreading of His kingdom.

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And so, with the long journey of one hundred and thirty miles nearly over, Jesus met Saul of Tarsus. It was midday; and the Eastern sun was blazing down so intensely as to make the travellers long for the shelter of the city walls, already in sight in the distance, when suddenly a dazzling light from heaven shone round them, a light so intense, so appalling, that Saul fell to the ground.

And there in the dust, shielding his eyes from that overpowering brilliance, Saul heard a voice :

“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me ?”

Saul's memory must have flown to many whom he had persecuted, and he faltered out :

“Who art Thou, Lord ?”

And the voice replied :

“I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

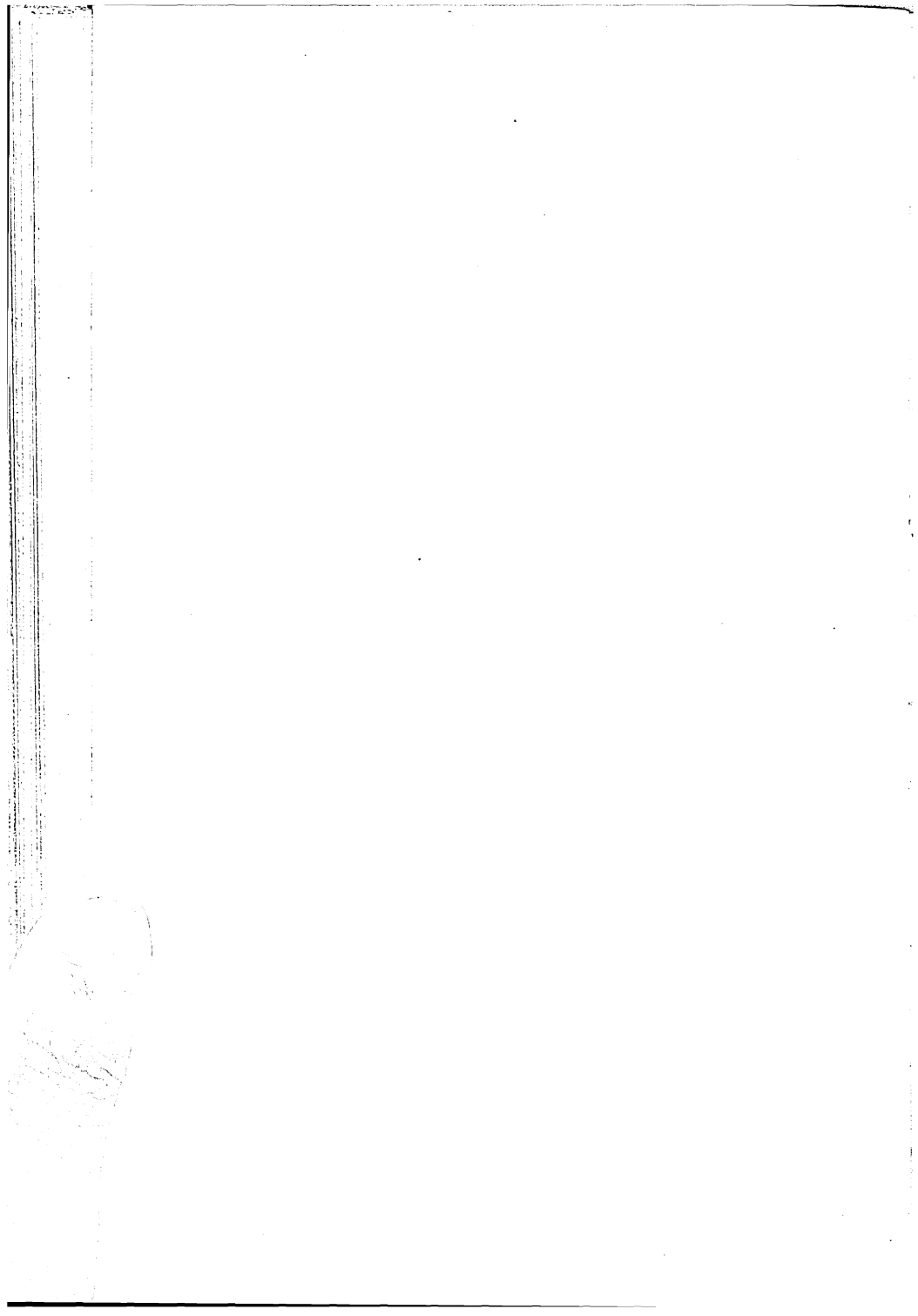
In Palestine oxen were used then as now for work in the fields, and it was the pricking of the ox-goad that Jesus referred to. A whip would have had little effect on the thick skins of the sluggish and patient oxen, but the goad—a wooden shaft with a pointed iron tip—pricked the beasts into renewed activity. Any kicking against the persuasion of the goad would of course drive the point further in. It was as if Jesus had said :

“Saul, Saul, you cannot resist God. You cannot drown conscience or wipe out memory, you cannot put your reason to sleep.”



THE CONVERSION OF SAUL.

"There in the dust . . . Saul heard a voice, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?'"



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No, Saul could not for long have struggled against his inward doubts ; he was too honest, too straightforward. But he might have done a vast amount more harm before he gave up the struggle, had not God Himself come to the rescue.

God coming to man's aid ! This forms the whole story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Always, everywhere, down the ages, men have groped blindly after God. They formed their creeds of fear or superstition, of sun and nature worship on the one hand and devil-worship on the other, in their search.

Only in the Bible do you have the wonderful fact of God seeking man. God came to Adam and Eve after their fall to show them the only way of escape from the consequence of their sin ; God came to Cain to give him a chance of confession and forgiveness ; God led the Israelites through the wilderness ; God sent His prophets to guide His chosen people ; and, greatest seeking of all, God sent His only Son to show man what life might be.

And now God came to find Saul.

And Saul gave in utterly and entirely, never for one second to waver or turn back from his allegiance. From that day, that moment, he was his Master's, for Jesus to do with as He wished.

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ?" he faltered.

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"Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

Obediently Saul arose and opened his eyes, and behold, he was blind. The companions of his journey had meanwhile been standing speechless in astonishment, hearing a voice that spoke, but not understanding the words that were uttered. Now they laid hold of Saul's hand and led him slowly and wonderingly to Damascus. There in the street called "Straight," which still stretches its three-mile length through the middle of the town, they found a lodging for him in the house of a man named Judas. For three days and nights he remained there, without food or drink, and in absolute darkness. Have you ever thought what it would be to be struck blind? To be dependent on others for everything, to be unable to read, to work, to walk or to write, to have literally nothing to do to pass the long and weary hours of an eternal night.

But Saul's blindness was part of God's plan for the making of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. God knew (He always knows) the best way to change a heart.

So Saul was left desolate and alone, and in pitch darkness; and Saul did the only thing he could do—he thought. We cannot know what his thoughts were, but certainly memories of Stephen would have come into them, words of his

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teacher Gamaliel, reports he had heard of Jesus' words and deeds. I think, too, that Saul certainly counted the cost during those three days. Knowing his father so well, he could have no doubt as to the old man's reception of the news. It would mean a complete cutting off from his home for ever, it would mean poverty and disgrace. His student friends and his dear old tutor would treat him as a traitor, a man faithless to his upbringing and his religion.

These were bitter thoughts Saul had to face, yet with everything of this world's happiness to lose, he never faltered.

Prophecies from the Old Testament, many parts of which he had learnt by heart, must have come into his mind to complete the argument of Stephen's speech. Why, now he came to think of it, there were those distant cousins of his, whose belief in Jesus of Nazareth had brought such disgrace on the family some years before. He had despised them then, and joined in the outcry against them. But the greatest thought of all, and the one that recurred the most often, was the thought of Christ's love, the wonderful condescension of that special revelation, that special call. That thought it was surely that led Saul to prayer, the prayer that brings peace and hope in its train.

And while he prayed, down Straight Street

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hurried the disciple Ananias, with his message of comfort. He was also his Lord's man, yet when he had received the order to visit Saul he had been startled into expostulation.

"What, Lord," he had exclaimed, "go and give this man back his sight! His strange and sudden blindness is the only thing that keeps any of us safe for a moment."

"Yet," was the Lord's answer, "go and do as I have told you, for I have chosen this very man to carry My Name before Gentiles and kings, and I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake."

Ananias attempted no more remonstrances. Very thoroughly, very gently he carried out his mission.

"Brother Saul," he said quietly, as he laid his hands on the blind man's eyes, "the same Jesus who met you on the road has sent me, so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost."

Instantly Saul's sight was restored, and he rose up and was baptized. I am sure Ananias and he had many long talks, but the gratitude in Saul's heart had to find utterance in some immediate work for his Lord.

I do not think that Saul did much actual preaching as we understand the word. You cannot suddenly change all your rooted ideas and

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convictions, and start a complete and orderly set of new ones. Saul's mind must at first have been in utter confusion, he wanted to re-read his Bible with this new light to guide him. But he was not the man to sail for one moment under false colours. He had to proclaim his change of faith at once to all whom it concerned. That was sufficiently amazing in itself to create a tremendous stir in the town, an excitement that he did not at all desire. From the story in the Acts it would seem that he stayed in Damascus till forced to flight by the malice of his enemies, but this was not so. In his letter to the Galatians (Gal. i. 17, 18) we learn what perhaps Luke himself never knew.

Longing intensely for solitude in which to think and pray and meditate, Saul left Damascus almost at once for the desert land of Arabia, there to be alone with God and to learn direct from Him.

How often God uses loneliness to lift souls into fuller union with Him, and to prepare them for some special service! Moses spent forty years in the land of Midian, wandering with the sheep from pasture to pasture along the borders of the desert, and there he met God. David, tending his father's flock, learnt to know the God of the stars and the open spaces! Elijah in despair sought the wilderness, and there he heard the "still small voice." John the Baptist was in the desert until the day when God called him to start his life's

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work. Yes, and the Saviour of the world Himself underwent forty days of complete isolation at the very commencement of His ministry among men.

So Saul spent nearly three years in lonely wanderings, re-reading his Old Testament and communing with God. Then he returned to Damascus. He wanted to see Ananias again, and the place where he had first met his Lord.

It was during this second visit to the ancient capital of Syria that Saul's teaching confounded the Jews by his clear proofs of Christ's Messiahship. His preaching ended by bringing down on him the rage of the non-Christian Jews. To do them justice, one must remember that to them he would have appeared a turncoat of the very worst type, and they knew him to be dangerous from the wisdom and depth of his arguments and the wideness of his knowledge. At last their rage led them to take steps for his death. They set a guard at the city gates with strict orders to arrest him should he try to escape that way. Meantime they searched the town;

But by now Saul had many friends. These warned him of the Governor's intention, and also provided for his safety. Hiding him by day, they watched their opportunity, and one dark moonless night they let him down over the city wall, as once at Jericho Rahab had saved the life of the two spies.

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Chased from Damascus, Saul made his way to Jerusalem, only to find the disciples there afraid of him. Perhaps they thought his discipleship a trick to enable him the more easily to discover their names and homes. Only Barnabas knew better. Perhaps he had known Saul in his boyhood, since Cyprus and Tarsus are not far distant. If so, he would have known him to be incapable of hypocrisy. Perhaps he was a better reader of character than the others. In any case, with ready kindness and sympathy he made friends with the former persecutor. More than that, he became his spokesman, winning the others round to belief in the genuineness of Saul's conversion.

But for some reason Paul only saw two of the heads of the Church during this visit—Peter and James the Less (Gal i. 18, 19). Peter offered to put him up, and for a whole fortnight the rough Galilean fisherman and the polished scholar were under the same roof. A strange pair indeed, but bound by the ties of a common devotion, a common sense of God's forgiveness of personal sin.

Saul tried to preach in Jerusalem as he had tried at Damascus, but with the same result. "They would not receive his testimony." What wonder! Jerusalem was full of his old friends who had known him in his college days. And Saul learnt that a friend once alienated, once lost, makes the most bitter enemy a man can have. Before the fortnight

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was over his life was again in danger. The disciples counselled flight. Now, all through his life failure was bitter to Saul. He could fight a losing battle, but to give up, to allow his enemies to drive him away, was a course of action utterly against his nature. He could not face it without a direct order from his Lord. He took his trouble, his uncertainty to Him. The Temple Courts were always open for prayer, and it was there that Saul went.

"Make haste and leave Jerusalem at once," was the answer he received. "The Jews will not listen to you, but I have chosen you for work amongst the Gentiles" (Acts xxii. 18-21).*

Saul returned to Peter's house with his mind made up. Without delay the brethren escorted him to Cæsarea and saw him aboard a ship bound for Tarsus. His old home was a Gentile city; perhaps it was there that God meant him to labour.

It must have been a dreary home-coming. His father's house shut to him; his boyhood's friends

* Basil Matthews, in his splendid book *Paul, the Dauntless*, puts this vision at a much later date, during Paul and Barnabas' visit to Jerusalem with the alms for the poor sent from Antioch. The single reference to the vision would bear either interpretation and there are points for both views.

But Paul's great distress at finding his preaching unaccepted seems to me more likely at the earlier time in his life. At the later date he had formed his niche at Antioch where he had been a year; and his mission to the famine-stricken Jews at Jerusalem was only a temporary one, as his speedy return with Barnabas to Antioch shows.

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either gone or turning a cold shoulder on him, yet Saul stuck it out. Years passed by, and as far as we know little if any success attended his attempts to preach Jesus, for no Church was ever founded there. But it was there, in isolation worse than that of the desert, and in apparent failure, that Saul's fiery zeal deepened into patient endurance. It seemed as if Jesus had forgotten him as the long years went by and nothing happened. I believe it was harder for Saul to bear than all the sufferings and perils of his after-life. But he learnt to wait and to trust, and at last the call came.

CHAPTER X

PETER'S MISSION TOUR AND ITS RESULTS

WITH Saul gone, another period of freedom from persecution began for the Christian Church. The reason for this lay in a mad freak of the half-insane and utterly wicked Emperor Caligula. The idea had entered his head to have a statue of himself erected for worship in Jerusalem. In his capital of Rome he was accustomed to a slavish adoration such as the Romans had long since ceased to pay to their gods. It pleased him to think that his statue should obtain equal honour with the God of Israel. He ordered the carving to be executed. But the Jews thought otherwise. Mass meetings were held throughout Palestine, protests and petitions poured in on the Roman Governor at Cæsarea. Such was the ferment against this proposed desecration of their holy city that all lesser matters were for the time forgotten.

It was during this lull that Peter travelled about from place to place, visiting the Christians in outlying villages and remote farms, strengthening

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the faith of recent converts, confirming, preaching, explaining. Neither of the four Gospels had yet been written, so that the newly made Christians had to depend entirely on memory of the words they had heard, and the infrequent visits of those who gave their lives to the spreading of the Kingdom. Peter travelling thus along the road to Joppa came to Lydda. There he came across a poor man who for eight years had been bedridden with palsy. Palsy is a disease of the muscles and nerves, which gradually takes from the sufferer the command of his own limbs. The hands shake involuntarily, and the fingers fail to hold the thing gripped by them; the legs too totter and falter, and in bad cases walking becomes impossible. For eight years poor Æneas had been absolutely helpless, and Peter's quick pity was at once aroused.

"Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole; arise and make thy bed," he said, and immediately the muscles and nerves strengthened to instant use and obedience.

All those who lived in Lydda and the neighbouring plain of Sharon crowded to see the wonder of the man's healing, and "turned to the Lord." Peter probably stayed at Lydda some time, using the little town as a centre for his work among the Sharon shepherds and farmers. He was still there when an urgent message reached him from Joppa ten miles distant.

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A disciple named Tabitha (better known by her Greek name of Dorcas) had just died. During her lifetime she had visited the sick, and had helped the poor by gifts of clothes made by her own kind hands, and now that she was dead the women whom she had helped had collected to mourn and bewail her. Perhaps they felt how little they had really appreciated her sympathy and ready helpfulness while she was with them. Now it was too late to show how much they loved her. She was gone, and they would never again see her sweet smile nor watch her busy fingers that had worked so willingly and ceaselessly for them. Tears that were not all selfish fell fast as they gathered round the peaceful form upon the bed. At last somebody suggested sending for Peter. The rest caught at this one ray of hope, and willing messengers were speedily forthcoming.

This and more Peter learnt as he accompanied the two men along the road to the coast. Arrived at the house, he climbed to the upper chamber where the body lay quiet and still, and found the room full of weeping women. How the noise of tears and lamentation must have contrasted with the solemn serenity of the figure on the bed! The women crowded round the Apostle, showing him the work that Dorcas had done; praising her virtues, bemoaning her loss. Peter gently but firmly put them all outside. Alone in the now

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silent room he knelt and prayed to the Lord of all life ; then turning to the body he said, " Tabitha, arise." The woman's eyes opened, and seeing Peter she sat up, and he, calling the hushed and expectant widows, presented their benefactress to them alive.

Was she glad to return to life, we wonder, she who loved her Lord so dearly ? We may be sure that whatever her own loss, she recognized in her recall to earth God's gracious will, and rejoiced at the chance of serving Him here still longer.

And is it not a wonderful thing that neither from Dorcas, Lazarus, nor any of the others who were raised from the dead, do we hear a word about the great and unknown beyond ? Why ? It is the one thing of supreme interest to us all. Then why are we kept in ignorance ? The answer can only be that it is God's will. But of one thing we may be sure.

The same forethought and love that at birth bring the little naked baby into an unknown world, that provide loving arms to welcome and receive it, that send to the mother the very food that the baby needs : that same forethought and love are watching over the naked spirit when, leaving the body behind, it escapes from earthly fetters to life nearer the Master.

Paul wrote later : " O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? " There is none to those who love Jesus.

CHAPTER XI

PETER'S VISION AND ITS RESULTS

THE raising of Dorcas from the dead attracted much attention to Peter's preaching, and it became necessary to stay some time in that busy seaport in order to instruct the new disciples. Peter found a lodging in the house of a namesake, Simon the Tanner. This man had a house by the seaside facing out over the blue Mediterranean. From its windows the harbour was visible where in olden days the ships of Dan had plied to and fro with merchandise, and where in David's and Solomon's time the cedar wood was brought by King Hiram's sailors for the building of the Temple. Being the nearest port to Jerusalem it was still gay and bustling with sailing vessels of all sizes and nationalities. The Jews, with the strict Mosaic laws against touching a dead body, held the trade of a tanner in great abhorrence, and it was against the law to have a tannery inside the town. As a tanner, too, Simon would have been cut off from the services of the Synagogue except after long and careful purifying.

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His house probably lay isolated from all others, with its tanning yard close to it, so that it could be the more easily avoided. It is difficult to guess what led Peter to choose such a lodging, since he was not the man lightly to disregard Jewish prejudice. Perhaps the isolation and quietness of the house and its comparative safety attracted him, or it may be that his fisherman's heart went out to an abode from which he could watch the vessels as they came and went. Perhaps Simon the Tanner was a personal friend of his. In any case it was here that Peter chose to stay.

On one occasion he had gone up on to the flat roof of the house for prayer and meditation. It was midday, and most likely he had already done a long morning's work, for he was both tired and hungry.

Down below in the house the women of the household were preparing a meal, and Peter, glad of the quiet, escaped to the housetop to rest, as Jesus had so often done, by holding communion with God. While he was there he fell into a "trance."

We Britons, in this matter-of-fact and bustling age, have little idea of what a "trance" means, but in many lands in the East it is still practised. The person in absolute stillness and quiet wraps himself away, as it were, from all earthly distractions, till the eye does not see what is passing around, the ear does not hear any earthly

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sound, till thought itself ceases in the brain, and the whole being is like a tranquil lake ready to reflect faithfully the things above.

Peter, we read, from prayer fell into a trance and saw an inward vision.

A great flat vessel like a sheet knotted at the four corners appeared out of the sky and was lowered to the earth. Inside it were all kinds of animals, wild and tame, large and small, as well as birds and insects. Bewildered and amazed Peter watched, till he heard a voice :

“ Rise, Peter, kill and eat.”

He was hungry. Here was food. But Peter though a Christian was a strict Jew. These animals had all been pronounced unfit for human consumption by the laws of Moses.

So he answered : “ Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common or unclean.”

And the voice replied : “ What God hath cleansed that call not thou common.”

Three times was the order given, three times the same defensive answer made, three times the same warning added. Then the vessel was withdrawn, leaving Peter on the housetop wondering. He could see no sense or reason in this vision, think and ponder as he might. He was still utterly perplexed when he heard a knock at the outside gate. Probably some one wanting to see his host on business, he thought, as he caught sight of the

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Roman dress of one of the three strangers. And then Peter heard the inward voice of God's Spirit: "These men are looking for you, Peter. You need not be afraid to go with them, for I have sent them."

I think the interpretation of the vision was beginning to dawn on Peter as he hurried down to the gate and stood before the Roman soldier and the two slaves who accompanied him.

"I am the man you seek," he said, with ready kindness. "What do you desire me to do for you?"

"We have come from Cæsarea with a message from our master, the Centurion Cornelius. For many years now both he and his family have believed in the one true God. Our master is much beloved, not only by his own countrymen but by the Jews of Cæsarea, for he is just and true towards all men, and generous to the distressed and poor. Only yesterday he was at his midday prayer, and saw an angel who told him to send for you. We beg of you to come with us. Our master is waiting anxiously for your arrival, for he believes you have a message to give him from God."

Now, Peter knew that Cæsarea was thirty miles away, and that the men were tired and footsore.

"Come in," he said, "and stay the night, and to-morrow I will go with you."

What a strange party gathered for meals in

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that isolated house by the seaside that day ! The despised tanner and his family, the fisherman Apostle, a Roman soldier and two slaves.

Peter began to see more clearly.

These three men were Gentiles, and though proselytes to the Jewish religion, they were still far from being treated as on an equality with the chosen nation. The more favoured of these converts were those who had submitted to the rite of circumcision, but the majority had not done so. Cornelius and his family were among the latter and more numerous class. They would therefore still have been considered unclean by rigid Jews, who would have avoided visiting their houses or having meals with them.

Peter could not go back upon his word, but he foresaw that what he had promised to do would bring sharp criticism upon him. So while the servants of Cornelius rested, he went into Joppa and arranged for six of the Christians of the place to accompany him on the morrow. He felt a premonition that they would be useful as witnesses of what occurred. He resolved himself to be very prudent, very careful to avoid giving offence. But God who had sent Peter the special vision on the housetop took the course of events out of His servant's cautious hands into His own all-wise ones.

The little band of ten started together early next day. Somewhere along the road they rested

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for the night, for it was not till the day after leaving Joppa that they reached Cæsarea. Cornelius was eagerly looking out for them, and hastened to welcome the stranger by throwing himself in act of worship at Peter's feet.

Instantly Peter caught his arm.

"Stand up," he entreated; "I myself also am but a man."

Inside the house a quick glance round told Peter that he was in a mixed company of Romans and Jews, so with blunt directness he went straight to the point that he knew would be in the minds of all present.

"You all know how that no Jew is allowed to keep company or visit in the house of one of another nation; but God has showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

No doubt here he told them of his marvellous vision, of his uncertainty about it, and of the instant arrival of the three Gentile messengers. That vision combined with the angel's message to Cornelius was enough to convince those present that here, by God's own leading, was a case where Mosaic laws and rigid traditions were to be set on one side for a wider brotherhood.

So Peter preached the Lord who accepts any one who believes on Him, whatever his nation or colour. Only a very few words of Peter's speech are given; but at the end of his sermon—while he was still

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speaking, in fact—the Holy Ghost fell on that mixed assembly. Again the wonders of Pentecost were repeated. The newly made Christians spoke with tongues and prophesied.

The six men who had accompanied Peter could scarcely credit their ears. Never yet had the Holy Ghost been given to the unbaptized. It was the crowning proof of God's acceptance of the Gentile world, a sign of favour which swept away all Peter's remaining doubts and scruples. His question to that assembly seems to hint at a former reluctance to take upon himself the responsibility of baptizing these Gentiles, but now, with this manifestation of the Master's approval, how could the disciple hold back ?

“ Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we ? ” he asked.

As a means of obtaining the Holy Spirit, baptism was no longer necessary ; but it was still the outward sign of admission into Christ's Church. Yes, God works by means, but He is not bound by them. *We* are bound to use the means of grace He has given us as the authorized channels of His love and power ; but God has many ways of entrance into human hearts.

Peter did not stay long in Cæsarea. It was a place which already had had the Gospel preached to it, for Philip the Deacon had chosen it as his

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headquarters for his mission to the Samaritans. The further strengthening of Cornelius and his friends in the faith could be safely left to the Christians there, so Peter returned to Jerusalem. News of how the Gentiles had received the Gospel had preceded him, and he was met at once by sharp criticism and rebuke.

“What! You, a Jew, went into the house of the uncircumcised Gentiles and had meals with them!”

It was true. Peter had been led, forced, pushed into breaking a law given by God for a special reason centuries before. It is never easy to see the way clearly when an “old order” is changing and “giving place to new.” Peter and his brother Apostles were living in such a time, and it was most puzzling for them.

Christ had fulfilled the law to open out the larger way of universal love. The old laws forbidding intermixture with other nations had been necessary in the days when the Israelites were almost the only people holding the true faith, a mere handful in the midst of multitudes of heathen. But the Jews had lost sight of the reason for the law. It was to safeguard their weakness, to keep their religion pure in order that in God's good time the Jew might become the missionary of the world. All through their history they had been guarded, taught, ruled, punished and protected for that one object.

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Peter told his critics the entire story of his vision and all that followed. Perhaps he had expected to be asked to explain his action, for he had brought with him to Jerusalem the six Joppa disciples who had accompanied him to Cæsarea, and who could bear witness to the truth of his statement. Before the weight of their evidence disapproval melted into wonder.

“Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life,” they said, and glorified God.

CHAPTER XII

ANTIOCH

WE have seen how the Gospel reached Samaria, now we shall see what success it met with in the very large city of Syrian Antioch. This town lay in the north-west corner of Syria, in the angle formed by Asia Minor and Palestine. The great trade road of ancient times, which carried the goods of the East to the markets of the West, passed through its busy streets. The navigable river Orontes flowed by its walls, and opened an easy way to the immense sea-borne trade of the Mediterranean. Merchants and traders thronged its streets. The town was also wonderfully beautiful. Nature's loveliness had been enhanced by Greek and Syrian art in temple and shady colonnade. Greek luxury and Greek worship were the chief features of the place. A huge image of Jupiter, fashioned from the natural rock on one of the mountain peaks, towered above the town, and seemed to claim the place as his own. Immorality and wickedness were rampant. Greed,

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love of pleasure, and the gratification of every lust and passion formed the life of the inhabitants.

It was to this place that Jewish refugees first brought the news of the pure and spotless Lamb of God. The very strangeness of the teaching created a tremendous stir and excitement. The colony of Greek settlers and traders were intensely interested. Numbers crowded to listen to the preaching of these unknown missionaries, and with listening came conviction. One of these men was evidently the Lucius of Cyrene who afterwards became one of the heads of the Antioch Church, and was working with Paul in Corinth when he wrote his Epistle to the Romans (Rom. xvi. 21). We do not know for certain if he was a native of the African town of Cyrene, or a Jew of the dispersion, but in any case, black or white, he and his fellow-fugitives were not as exclusive as the Judæan Jews had been. With Peter's example before them, they did not restrict the Gospel message to the Jews only. The ready response of the Gentiles to their teaching must have been very encouraging, very heartening, after the coldness and reluctance of the Jew. Their numbers began to grow so rapidly that the Council in Jerusalem found it necessary to send one of their number to visit the Church. For this purpose they chose Barnabas, the big, kind-hearted, simple-minded landowner of Cyprus. He probably knew Antioch

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well, his island home lying so comparatively near the mainland. He would also understand how to deal with the mixed population of a foreign city.

What he found there gladdened his honest heart. The new converts were so genuinely in earnest, and so far trouble had not sprung up between the Gentile and the Jewish disciples. But I think Barnabas felt the dispute coming. A question here and a complaint there was enough to warn him of the brewing of mischief. For one thing, the heathen population of the town had invented a name for this new sect, thereby mixing up Jew and Gentile alike, and I do not think the Jews appreciated it.

We read : " The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."

Anyhow, it was while Barnabas was at Antioch that he remembered Saul of Tarsus. He recalled what his friend had told him about God having chosen him especially for work amongst Gentiles. True, he had not been safe for one moment in Jerusalem, but here at Antioch, with its Roman Governor and its foreign population, things were very different. Here surely was the very opening for Saul ! And what a comfort it would be to have his clear mind and great knowledge to appeal to should difficulties really arise later on about laws and observances !

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So one day Barnabas set sail for Tarsus to find Saul.

Can you picture the meeting? The big simple fellow shaking his friend's hand, and pouring out his plan, while the thin eager face of the smaller man lit up with the light of a new hope. I do not think Saul needed much persuading. The long years of waiting were over at last; the tool was ready for the great Builder's hand.

Saul was accepted at once by the Church at Antioch, and quickly became one of their most trusted leaders. It was a very happy year that he spent quietly in that great heathen city with his friend Barnabas. The very unlikeness of the two men's characters drew them together, and the Son of Consolation became very dear to the man whose self-confidence had been so utterly broken by those weary years of failure. Saul had learnt humility. His place at the end of the list of the teachers of Antioch (Acts xiii. 1) shows us the position he was content to occupy. Later on, when he embarked on his true life-work, it was with a power and a strength other than his own.

It was not till the end of the year that the first break came in the ordered routine of their life. A prophet named Agabus visited the town from Jerusalem and foretold bad harvests and a great scarcity of food. Instantly the thoughts of the disciples flew to the poor brethren of Judæa, who

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they knew would suffer terribly should famine raise the price of food and other necessities. They themselves had nothing to fear, for Antioch was not dependent on local harvests as Jerusalem was. Her port was always open to the grain ships of Egypt, and even if the price of corn increased, they had money enough and to spare. A large collection was made, and Barnabas and Saul were chosen to carry their gift to the heads of the Church in Jerusalem.

The two friends made no long stay in the Holy City. Their mission was quickly accomplished, and the new persecution which had broken out in Judæa made the disciples there anxious for their safety. It was probably on this account that Barnabas decided to take his young cousin Mark back with him to Antioch.

CHAPTER XIII

PERSECUTION AGAIN

WHILE the Church of Antioch was being quietly built up, another persecution fell upon the Church in Jerusalem. The Emperor Caligula had died just in time to stop the erection of his statue in Jerusalem. The Jews breathed freely once more and public agitation began to subside. But discontent once started is slow to evaporate. It is apt to leave men's minds sore and ready for any fresh grievance. None knew this better than King Herod, who under the Roman dominion was responsible for the peace and order of Judæa. It was as a popular movement that he inaugurated a new persecution of the Christians.

This is the third Herod of the Bible story. He was the grandson of the Herod who had tried to kill Jesus by the murder of the babes of Bethlehem, and son of the Herod who had killed John the Baptist; a bad man of a bad race. All three were men to whom cruelty and bloodshed were as nothing provided they could satisfy their own evil passions, or secure political advancement.

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“ And he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword ; and because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to take Peter also.”

How brief and short a notice of the martyrdom of the first Apostle to follow his Master : the only Apostle whose death is mentioned in the Bible ! Years before James and John had been brought to Jesus by their fond mother, with the request that He would grant them the nearest place to Him in His Kingdom ; and in answer to His searching question they had both asserted boldly that they could drink His cup. Very grave and very gentle had been their Lord's reply :

“ Ye shall drink indeed of My cup and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with.”

Yes, the elder of the two was the first of the band to drink Christ's cup of suffering and to be baptized with the baptism of blood. Did he think of those words as he was being led to the place of execution ? There is a story told in connection with his death which is recorded by the Early Church historians.

At his trial a Roman soldier had been one of his accusers, probably paid to distort facts and invent evidence by the authorities. He was so much struck by the Apostle's calmness and brave bearing that, whilst on the way to the place of execution, he fell down and asked his forgiveness.

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James lifted the man up and kissed him.

"Peace, my son, peace be to thee and the pardon of thy faults," he said. The Roman, struck to the heart by such royal magnanimity, at once took James' Lord for his own, and the two men were beheaded together.

King Herod, delighted at having pleased the Jews and gratified his hatred of the Christians at the same time, proceeded to capture Peter also. The Passover was close at hand, and the King, who found it politic to make a great outward parade of his religious observances, knew well the Jewish feeling about transacting ordinary business during those sacred days. Being out to gain popularity, he argued that a week more or less in prison would make very little difference ; yet he could not avoid a superstitious fear that his plans might go astray. Peter had escaped once before, he remembered. So this time he ordered that very special precautions should be taken. Four soldiers were set to guard the prisoner day and night, their watch being relieved by a fresh set of men every three hours. Of these, two were in the prison cell itself, bound to Peter by a chain, so that the least movement on his part would instantly rouse them, even should they fall asleep during their watch. The other two were placed, one outside the door of the cell, and the other at the outer gate of the prison. Day and night, therefore, the Roman soldiers

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watched, while day and night the Christian Church prayed for Peter's release.

Meantime the Passover Feast came and went, and the last day of Peter's imprisonment drew to its close. If he had had any hope of deliverance it must have grown very faint by now. Was this, then, the meaning of Christ's mysterious words to him on the seashore of Galilee? And was he to follow his Lord as Stephen and James had done? If so, he was ready.

The prison cell had been hot and stuffy all day, and he had been glad to take off his sandals and throw off his outer coat. Now, with the evening, a grateful coolness had crept in and made sleep possible. With all fear of to-morrow's ordeal burned away by his great love for his Lord, Peter lay down between the Roman guard and slept calmly and peacefully.

After a while the soldiers followed his example. Their rough talk and jokes died away, and only the sound of regular breathing broke the silence of the place. The night wore on. Then suddenly, without warning and without noise, a light shone out, piercing the gloom with a heavenly radiance. The rescuer had come!

For a moment the angel messenger must have stood looking down on three sleeping men; then he stooped and roused Peter with quick decided action, lifting him dazed and bewildered to his

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feet. The chains fell clattering from his wrists and feet, but neither the light, nor the noise, nor the sound of voices roused the Roman guard.

"Put on your sandals," said the angel; and Peter strapped them on his feet as in a dream.

"Cast thy garment about thee and follow me," was the next command; and Peter wrapped himself quickly in his discarded cloak.

Unseen and unheard they left the cell and passed the two other soldiers stationed at the doors. Crossing the prison court, they reached the iron gates leading to the city. These swung back of themselves at their approach, and the two passed through in safety. It was not till Peter was in the narrow streets that the angel suddenly left him. So far the whole occurrence had seemed like a dream; but alone in the dark and deserted thoroughfare Peter came to himself, and realized that once more God had defeated the evil intentions of the enemies of the Christian Church; once more had baffled the spite of the Jews.

James beheaded! Peter saved! Does it not remind us forcibly of Christ's saying: "One shall be taken, and the other left"? And that other saying of His: "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter"?

Peter thought quickly what he had better do. To go and preach in the Temple Courts, as he and John had done on their previous release from

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prison, would have meant instant recapture and death. *Then* the people were favourable to them ; *now* people, king and priests were hostile to the faith. *Then* God had told the Apostles what to do ; *now* he left Peter to use his own judgment. The nearest Christian house was that of Mary, the kinswoman of Barnabas and the mother of Mark. She must have had as generous and openhearted a nature as her cousin, for Peter had no doubt that there he would find some of the brethren assembled. He remembered how they had all gathered there to pray for James, and was certain that even at that moment prayer was being offered for him too. Hurrying along the streets he reached the house and knocked at the outside gate. At that hour of night, the sound must have startled the inmates. Had Herod discovered their place of meeting ? And did he intend to capture yet more of the disciples ?

Mark's mother knew enough of Roman impatience to avoid any unnecessary delay.

"Go, Rhoda," she said to her little maid-servant. "Go and ask who is there, and bring me word."

Startled and trembling the girl obeyed. I am sure her voice quavered as she asked the question ; but the answer she received sent her flying back with a face radiant with joy.

"It is Peter, the son of Jonah !" she exclaimed.

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All night long they had prayed for Peter's deliverance. Now the wonder of an answered prayer was too much for them.

"You are quite mad," they told her at first; and then: "It must be his angel."

But hark! The knocking still continued louder and more impatient, and at last they hurried to the door to judge for themselves. There could be no mistaking that well-known voice. Instantly they flung the gate wide, and crowded round their friend, questioning and rejoicing.

But Peter knew how short the time was before his escape would be discovered. Even if those two soldiers in his prison cell remained asleep, at the end of their three-hours' watch a new band would relieve them, and then his disappearance must be noticed. The search for him too would be vigilant, since his recapture alone would save the lives of the guard. Quickly he told them of God's wonderful mercy towards him, and gave them a special message to James, who presided over the Church at Jerusalem;

This James must be distinguished from the James so recently murdered, the son of Zebedee and brother of John. He is called "James the Lord's brother," though as the Hebrew word for brother is equally applied to a half-brother or a first cousin, it has always been a matter of doubt in the Church as to what was the actual relationship

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between them. He was one of the brethren who, during the early part of Christ's ministry, refused to believe on Him, though we cannot doubt that he always followed the life and doings of Jesus with especial interest. There must have been something about the sublime death on the Cross that appealed to James' self-sacrificing and noble nature. At any rate, the Saviour of the world thought James worth a special revelation of Himself after the Resurrection.

"He appeared to James," Paul tells us (1 Cor. xv. 7). From that time James was won. More than that, he brought his brothers over to the same belief. This we know from their presence with the disciples as they waited after His Ascension for the promised gift. James' uprightness and strict impartiality, his rigid observance of all Jewish customs, his fearless devotion to Jesus made him a fitting head of the Church in Jerusalem. It was to him in that capacity that Peter sent the message of his deliverance, before thinking out measures for his own safety, just as a captain or lieutenant reports to his commanding officer.

Where Peter went for safety we are not told. He was safe in hiding before the hubbub occasioned by his escape spread through the town. The frenzied guard searched desperately high and low. They assured their officers and the king that nothing but supernatural means could have spirited away

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their prisoner. All to no avail. Herod was not a merciful king, nor would he for one moment admit the possibility of a miraculous rescue, even although his inmost heart told him that it must be the truth. It was easier to call it gross neglect of duty, and to execute the four soldiers involved.

But the persecutor and tyrant was himself soon to meet his fate.

The people of Tyre and Sidon had angered him so much that he was thinking of punishing them by an invasion of their territory. He began to gather his troops together for that purpose. The offending cities were terrified. Though a rich mercantile nation, whose sailors boldly navigated their ships on far distant seas, they were not self-supporting at home. They depended for wheat and oil on the harvests of Galilee, which would be lost to them if at war with Herod. Anxious to avoid certain disaster, they hurriedly sent an embassy to Cæsarea where the despot was collecting his army.

By bribes and promises they made Blastus, Herod's chamberlain, their friend, knowing well his influence over his wicked master. By his intervention Herod's wrath was in some measure appeased. The military preparations were suspended, and a day fixed for an audience with the Phœnician envoys. The king intended to overawe them by the pomp and magnificence of his

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appearance. He had his throne placed in the Court of Judgment, and in royal state came to hear the case of the offenders. Blastus may have given the Phœnician officials a hint, for after the King's speech they gave a great shout.

"It is the voice of a god and not of a man," they cried.

No flattery was too gross for this monarch's ears, no praise too outrageous for him to swallow. For an instant gratified pride shone in his eyes; then his face suddenly paled, his limbs shook, and he dropped forward on his gilded throne stricken to death by a horrible disease.

Once more the Christian Church had a respite from persecution, during which it grew and multiplied.

CHAPTER XIV

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

SAUL and his friend Barnabas had returned to Antioch as soon as their mission at Jerusalem was accomplished. It was perhaps the only place that Saul ever looked on as home, after his childhood's home at Tarsus, and it was there that in later years he loved to return in any interval of his missionary labours. But happy as he was in Antioch, Saul longed for a wider sphere of usefulness, and as he watched the caravans from Damascus, Persia and Egypt passing along its busy streets, his heart must have leapt to follow them to the far distant cities of the vast Gentile world. There lay the pioneer work for which his soul longed. But he had learnt to distrust his own judgment during those years of waiting. The mind that afterwards bore the weight of "the care of all the churches" with such a magnificent organizing ability was content to use its powers under the direction of men far less able than he. It was good discipline for Saul of Tarsus.

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Then one day, in the middle of public worship, the definite call of God came for which Saul had waited so long.

"Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

Neither the exact work nor the place was specified to the open assembly. God does not interfere with man's common sense in the management of his time and life. If every detail of our lives were clearly dictated by the Spirit, all responsibility of choice and action would be taken from our hands.

God does not work so.

Peter, left suddenly in the streets of Jerusalem by the angel of deliverance, had to make his own plans for safety. In the great crises of life God often sends His angel, or points the way so clearly that there can be no mistake, provided we are on the look-out for His signal. For the rest, He leaves us His indwelling Spirit to guide our human plans and decisions.

So with Barnabas and Saul.

We can picture how the two friends rejoiced at that special call, and how they must have discussed which part of the Gentile world they would first visit. Cyprus was certainly the choice of Barnabas. He would long to carry the Gospel to his island home, and Saul's ill-success at Tarsus put that town out of the question. Cyprus, too, was close

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at hand, and easily reached by ship from Antioch. But before leaving, one thing remained to be done. The two missionaries received the laying-on of hands, thus marking them off as Apostles, especially chosen by God Himself. They sailed from Seleucia, taking with them young Mark as helper and assistant. One of his duties would have been the baptizing of converts, for Paul, we know from his own letters, very rarely baptized with his own hands. He was afraid lest Christ's glory should be shadowed in any way by the reverence which the converts would naturally feel towards the person from whom they first heard the good news; and lest in honouring the servant they should forget the Master.

The three men travelled slowly through the island of Cyprus, until they reached Paphos, the residence of the Roman Governor. News of their preaching had preceded them, and Sergius Paulus sent them a courteous message, requesting to hear what they had to say. In the assembly which collected eagerly to listen was a Jewish wizard, named Elymas, who by his tricks and pretended messages from God had gained a great deal of power over the people and even over the Governor himself. Like Simon of Samaria he was probably a clever man, using his superior knowledge to work on the fears and superstitions of the islanders. As Saul preached, Elymas watched the Governor's

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face anxiously. He saw his patron's usual expression of calm and polite attention change into a vivid interest such as his ready wit had never been able to call forth. The sight made Elymas lose his head. He should have known Sergius better than to interrupt an audience that the Roman had himself arranged, but jealousy and selfish fear broke through all prudence and restraint.

He broke in vehemently on the speech, contradicting Saul's statements, jeering at his authority and mission, and striving his utmost to distract the attention of the Governor.

Sergius did not interfere. Probably the altercation between his old favourite and the new teacher amused him. It was clearly a trial of strength and wits.

At last Saul turned on his tormentor.

"Child of the devil, enemy of good," he cried, "full of all mischief, why do you persist in withstanding God? And now, behold, God's hand shall smite you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a season."

No doubt the memory of his own three days' blindness and all he had undergone, influenced Saul in setting a limit to the sorcerer's punishment. Simon the Samaritan sorcerer always continued an enemy to Jesus, but we may hope that Elymas, under this awful infliction, may have learnt his utter helplessness and God's amazing love. When

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the blind man had found some compassionate hand to lead him home, the disturbance quieted down, and Saul continued his speech. The new teaching clearly impressed the Roman immensely. It was so absolutely unlike the religion of Rome. The gods of Rome were revengeful, proud, and delighted in cruelty and immorality; Jesus was forgiving, meek, full of gentleness and purity. To the Roman, might was right; wealth was power; pleasure and self-seeking the one aim in life. To the Christian, life was service; and in that service for Jesus he found his true happiness and peace.

From astonishment Sergius Paulus was led to belief, and thus another Roman gentleman acknowledged Jesus to be the Son of God.

It is at this point in the story of the Acts that the great Apostle of the Gentiles drops the Hebrew name of Saul for its Roman equivalent—Paul. It may have originated from a wish of the Roman, or Saul may have thought the change advisable before going farther afield among the Gentile world.

From Paphos the three friends took ship and sailed to the mainland of Asia Minor.

There Mark deserted them and returned to Jerusalem. Perhaps the perils of the coming journey over the robber-infested mountains of the Taurus Range into the district of Pisidia daunted him. He may have been home-sick, or have

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disliked the inferior position which he occupied. Most likely it was a mixture of motives that decided his action; but we know that his abrupt departure wounded and distressed both Paul and Barnabas.

The Apostles did not stay long at Perga. The town lay in the plain, under the Taurus Mountains which sheltered it from the northern winds, thus making it a perfect winter resort, but almost unbearably warm and sultry in summer. At the commencement of the hot season the inhabitants were accustomed to move to their villas on the slope of the foothills, leaving the port practically deserted. If the Apostles reached the town after May, they would have found closed houses and almost empty streets; so they too pushed northward over the mountain range.

It was a wild country they had to traverse. Roads were non-existent, and the tracks were steep and stony, and cut up by the torrents which poured down them in the rainy season. The people too were fierce and rough. Robbers lurked among the rocks and crags, ready to pounce upon the traveller.

Through these perils the Apostles passed safely, and in due time reached Pisidian Antioch. This town, like its greater namesake, also lay on the great trade road from Babylon to Ephesus. Following Christ's example, Paul and Barnabas first attended the service of the synagogue, and

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after the reading of the Old Testament were invited by the Jewish Rulers to address the congregation.

In the sermon that Paul preached them, he reviewed (as Stephen had in his long defence) the whole course of Jewish history, showing how each event and prophecy led up to and foretold Jesus as the Messiah. The result of his address was very varied. The service over, the congregation dispersed, some to think over Paul's words in private, some to gather round him in the open air begging for further instruction; and some already opposed to the new teaching to plan how they might best hinder it.

All that week the two friends moved about the town speaking chiefly to the Gentiles, always the most ready to listen. When the next Sabbath came, the crowd that gathered in and round the synagogue surprised the Jews. It did more than that. It made them furious with jealousy and envy. Never had they been able to collect such a congregation or arouse so much interest.

They resorted to the usual methods of those anxious to make a disturbance and hinder a speech. They interrupted, they contradicted Paul's statements and reviled the Saviour whom he honoured.

"Very well," Paul told them at last, "we were bound to preach to you Jews first, because our Lord told us to do so. We have done so, and you refuse to listen. Lo! now we turn to the Gentiles."

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This made the Jews more furious still, and when anger rules, reason and common sense flee away. If you have a gift offered you which you refuse to accept, you have no right to be annoyed if somebody else accepts it gratefully. The Jews were like the dog in the fable who wished to keep the ox away from the hay. Feelings of jealousy and envy kept in the heart lead quickly to hatred and persecution, and the Apostles were soon publicly expelled from the town, but not before they had made many disciples. These were full of the joy that comes from union with God, a joy which not even the loss of their beloved teachers could dim.

CHAPTER XV

ICONIUM AND LYSTRA HEAR THE GOOD NEWS

ICONIUM was the next place of importance reached by the Apostles. It lay nearly a hundred miles east of Antioch along the great trade route. As the Apostles journeyed along day by day, they would have met a succession of caravans carrying Egyptian and Persian goods westwards to the markets of Rome, Greece and Constantinople. Other caravans would have picked them up and passed them on their homeward way. It was a busy thoroughfare at all times, and especially when autumn and winter storms stopped the competition of the sea-borne trade.

We may be sure that the Apostles lost no opportunity that offered of talking to those whom they met at the halting-places along the road, as well as to the inhabitants of the villages and hamlets where they stopped for food or water. But these details we have to supply by our own imagination, the story of the Acts dealing only with the broad outstanding facts about the spread of the Kingdom.

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Notwithstanding their experience at Antioch, the Apostles on reaching Iconium followed their usual custom of attending the service of the synagogue. No matter what the result, the Jews were to have the first chance wherever they went.

The same difference of opinion resulted as before. A few believed, many were indifferent, while others sought to stop the teaching by force. The Jews of Iconium went further than those of Antioch. They plotted to stone the two strangers. Luckily rumours of the plot reached the ears of Barnabas and Paul in time to enable them to escape. They fled to two much smaller towns in the same province, Lystra and Derbe.

Very little detail is given of the success of their preaching in these places, but we know it was at Lystra that Timothy and his parents lived, and it may well have been that the seeds of the true faith were sown in the boy's eager heart at this first visit of Paul to his native town. Perhaps he was present in the crowd on the day that Paul healed the crippled man.

Like the crippled beggar of Solomon's Porch, this poor man had never walked. One day he was present during a street address, and by his attentive bearing, as well as his pitiful condition, caught the Apostle's compassionate eye.

With that quick insight into character that

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he possessed, Paul recognized the man's hidden faith, and with a loud ringing voice, commanded—"Stand upright on thy feet."

Did the man reply, "Sir, I cannot; ever since I was born my limbs have been useless"?

No! he attempted at once to do what he was told, and lo! the impossible became the possible, and he was healed.

This miracle excited the townsfolk intensely, and they shouted out, "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men"; but as they spoke in the dialect of Lycaonia the Apostles did not gather the sense of what was said. In the story of their own heathen gods, it was a common fable that Jupiter, the head god, and some of the lesser divinities, sometimes disguised themselves as men so as to visit the earth and punish or reward their worshippers. Barnabas, they said, must be Jupiter, from his greater height and more commanding appearance, and Paul was evidently Mercury, well-known as Jupiter's active messenger and mouthpiece.

So while the Apostles quietly returned to their lodging, the Greeks hurried off to the Temple of Jupiter, just outside the city gate, and spoke to the priest in charge. He hastened to collect oxen to sacrifice to these descended divinities, and the people decked the beasts with garlands of leaves and flowers in their honour. Then in solemn state

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and great rejoicing the procession set out for the Apostles' dwelling.

The noise of singing and the tramp of feet first warned Paul and Barnabas of what was happening. One glance out of the window sufficed. They had both often seen sacrifices offered to Jupiter in their own homes of Tarsus and Cyprus; and now in horror and grief at the strange mistake of the crowd, they rushed out to stop the proceedings. In their sorrow and shame, they even tore their clothes, a sign that would have gone far to convince the people, for who ever heard of a real god refusing homage?

"Sirs, sirs," they exclaimed, as they pushed their way among the crowd, "why do you do this? Indeed, you have made a great mistake. We are men like yourselves, like you subject to pain and illness and death. There is only one true God, the God Whom we preach unto you. He only made the world and everything it contains. These gods that you worship are no gods; your sacrifices to Jupiter are foolish and useless. Believe in the living God and turn from these vanities."

Gradually the earnestness of this appeal persuaded the reluctant people to retire, driving back the oxen to the Temple stables. But it was a sullen and dangerous crowd that dispersed. The Apostles had had little time to pick their words, and they had offended the Lystrian townsfolk

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deeply. They had thrown cold water on their religious enthusiasms, and had made them look ridiculous in the eyes of the Jews living in their midst. Thoughts of suspicion and distrust lurked in many hearts that night. All the mob of Lystra needed was an agitator to fan their dissatisfaction into a flame of hatred. Nor were leaders long in coming.

Jews from Antioch and Iconium, we read, arrived at Lystra. We do not know if spite and enmity was the reason of their journey, or whether business brought them eastward along the merchants' way. The townsfolk of Iconium, who had been the most violent against the Apostles before, were most likely the ringleaders in this new persecution. They had planned to stone the wandering preachers at Iconium; now they easily persuaded the Lystrians to carry the plan into effect. Unlike the Jews, the Greeks and natives of Lystra had no scruples about stoning their victims within the city, and it was not till Paul lay motionless and bleeding on the ground that he was dragged roughly to the city gate, and cast outside as dead. The murderers returned exulting to their homes, leaving the few sorrowing disciples to mourn unmolested over the apparently lifeless body. We do not know how long they stood there, but suddenly, as they watched, Paul's eyes opened and he rose to his feet.

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With a heart full of joyful wonder and adoring love, Paul accompanied the disciples back into the city for the night, setting out next day for Derbe with his friend Barnabas, who by some means had escaped the fury of the mob.

And so Paul began one step along the path of suffering that Jesus had marked out for this chosen Apostle of His. Paul knew, as we all know, that nothing we do or bear can atone for sins committed, set right mistakes made, or recall words once spoken. Only one sacrifice can cleanse from guilt. But if Divine forgiveness, as some think, includes an opportunity for making good, how beautiful that the first recorded pain Paul bore for his Master was that which in ignorance and pride he had watched Stephen endure!

At Derbe Barnabas and Paul discussed their further journey. By continuing eastward along the road they could reach their home at Antioch with very little trouble or danger; but both men knew how short and broken their stay in the four inland towns of Asia Minor had been, and they could not bear to leave the new believers with so little instruction. So, in spite of enemies in every city, the two retraced their steps, strengthening the hearts and faith of the converts, and warning them that persecution and trial were likely to be their lot, but that beyond all earthly trouble and sorrow lay the Kingdom of God.

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The division and dispute were so hot among them, that at last Paul and Barnabas were chosen with the young Greek, Titus (Gal. ii. 1, 3), and other brethren to carry the question to Jerusalem, and to lay the matter before the Council there. They all felt that some definite decision must be given to prevent the threatened division of the Church.

The chosen band took the road through Phœnicia and Samaria. It was a very different journey from the Apostles' recent travels in Asia Minor. Here Christian friends accompanied them on their way till the next friend's house was reached. No dangers, no persecutions, no hardships! A warm welcome met them all along the road, and with joy those scattered homes heard the wonderful news of the success of the first missionary journey.

At Jerusalem the Apostles and Elders met to consider the matter. After much disputing, Peter stood up and reminded the assembly of God's special call to him in the case of the Gentile Cornelius, and how God's gift of the Holy Spirit was given to the Roman and his friends equally with the Jewish believers; given, too, before anything was suggested about baptism, let alone circumcision and rules of conduct. Why, then, did the Church now seek to bind the Gentiles to keep the law of Moses, when God Himself had admitted them freely without any such rule? He pointed out that they were criticizing God by their action.

A DIFFICULT QUESTION

Then the crowd grew silent, and Paul and Barnabas were able to declare the wonders that God had done among the Gentiles of Asia Minor by their hands.

James, as head of the Council, pronounced judgment. He reminded the assembly that God's kindness to the Gentiles was no new thing. Amos had prophesied that *all* men should seek the Lord, and now God, in the person of His Church, was going out to seek the Gentiles.

So James decreed that circumcision was not to be made a binding necessity on the Gentile Christians, but that four rules of life were to be kept by them, partly for their own sakes and for the sake of the Jewish brethren among whom they lived. For how could Christian Jews and Gentiles meet in happy fellowship at each other's houses for meals if they kept different rules about what things they might or might not eat? Out of love and brotherliness, the Gentiles should be willing to give up eating food which the Jews could not touch.

Suppose a person came to stay at your house whom you knew to be unable to eat ham, and knowing that, you provided ham and nothing else for breakfast and supper. However much your friend loved you, he could not help feeling hurt and offended at your lack of thoughtfulness and consideration.

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So the Gentile Christians were asked—not from necessity, but from brotherliness—to keep from eating blood or animals killed by strangling.

But there were also the heathen neighbours and friends to be considered. These formed the greater part of the population of the towns and villages, with whom intercourse was a necessity. Yet the Gentile Churches must set an example of conduct, must draw the line somewhere.

James therefore decided to ask them to keep away from the feasts and impure amusements that went on at the idol-temples; for no one can serve God and idols. This decision of James pleased all the Council, and letters were written to the different Gentile Churches, and sent to Antioch for future distribution by Paul and Barnabas; Judas and Silas going with them as special messengers from the Council.

On reaching Antioch a great meeting was called, and the letter was read amidst much rejoicing. The Gentile Christians willingly promised to keep the four rules of conduct; rules which would separate them from the heathen and draw them nearer to their Jewish brethren.

His work done, Judas returned to Jerusalem, but Silas remained on at Antioch.

CHAPTER XVII

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

IT was Paul who first felt the spur of missionary zeal. You remember that the two Antiochs were connected by a great and ancient trade-route, and it is likely that messages and letters were sent to and fro by the hands of traders and merchants travelling along the road. It may well have been that news from Lystra or Iconium had stirred Paul to action, but in any case the need of the infant Churches of Asia Minor for guidance and supervision was obvious. It is quite likely also that Paul wished to deliver the letters from the Council by his own hand.

Barnabas, too, was ready to go, but here arose a difficulty. Barnabas was determined to give young Mark a second trial, while Paul would not hear of his accompanying them, fearing lest he should desert them again just when their need was greatest. Barnabas was willing in his kindness of heart to risk the success of their journey, feeling sure that his kinsman would this time rise to the

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occasion ; while Paul felt that Mark, having proved himself unworthy before, was not fit for the trust and responsibility of the post. In fact, Paul refused point-blank to take him, and Barnabas would not go without him.

Here was a real quarrel between two of God's chosen Apostles, the very two who together had faced so many perils. And see how it started. Just with a difference of opinion—both men thinking they were right, and forgetting to look to God for guidance. Yes, even those who are chosen by God, and have the gift of His Holy Spirit, need to be constantly on the alert against the Devil's tempting. Both had forgotten the Master's example in their zeal for the Master. Where were meekness and lowliness ? Gone in human pride.

The quarrel was so bitter that the two friends decided to part. So Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas and started by land along the merchants' road to Lystra and Derbe. Thus God brought good out of evil, for two parties started instead of one.

We know that this quarrel did not last ; how could it between those who were earnestly and sincerely trying to follow the same Lord—the Lord who taught forgiveness to friend and foe ?

In after years we find Paul and Barnabas, Silas and Mark all bound together by ties of love, for by

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that time Mark had fully justified Barnabas's faith in him. If you look at Paul's letter to the Colossians (Col. iv. 10), you will see that Mark was once more working under Paul in Rome, and being a real comfort to the older man in his first imprisonment there. And nearer the end of Paul's life, in that second imprisonment of which we know so little, he wrote to Timothy to bring Mark with him to Rome (2 Tim. iv. 11). And why! Because he was so useful in preaching the Gospel. So the Mark who had feared the perils of the journey through Asia Minor was ready to brave the far worse dangers of the wicked city of Rome, at the time of Nero's hideous persecution of the Christians, for love of Christ and of the man who had sternly refused his company on his second missionary journey.

Nothing is said in the Acts about the success of Barnabas and Mark in Cyprus. Probably they made the island their headquarters for some time, and it was there that one report tells us that Barnabas was afterwards stoned to death.

The story of the Acts follows Paul and Silas, because it is the story of the spread of Christ's Kingdom, and before Paul returned again to Antioch he was to journey far west, and carry the Gospel into Europe. For the same reason the revisiting of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch is told in a few words only. This time we read of no persecutions.

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At Lystra Timothy joined the two missionaries. Timothy was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother. Timothy's father, like many of the cultured Greeks of that time, had probably found his heathen religion of gods and goddesses unsatisfying. At any rate he allowed his wife to teach her boy the religion of the Jews without protest or interference. So little Timothy had been taught by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice, ever since he could remember, the wonderful stories of God's dealings with His people of old, and of the Saviour that should come. That Saviour both Timothy and his mother had found, and now quite willingly Eunice gave her boy to God. He, too, was to help in the spreading of the Kingdom, and journey with Paul and Silas.

The older men must have found Timothy very useful. He would have to baptize the converts, run errands, arrange for lodgings, and buy the food and necessities of the journey, thus easing the burdens of difficult travelling in a hundred ways. After leaving these four towns Paul struck north-east through the provinces of Phrygia and Galatia, meaning to make for the Jewish colonies on the Black Sea. But in Galatia illness kept him a prisoner. Further progress was for the time impossible; but though unable to travel and suffering from pain and weakness, Paul still preached Christ. The kind-hearted, impulsive country people treated

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him as "an angel of God," and took care of him, generously ready to give their own eyes, if by so doing they could have eased his pain. Perhaps it may have been actually some acute inflammation of the eyes that the Apostle was suffering from, but whatever the ailment, it was one that Paul asked God to remove, deeming it a hindrance to his life-work. God's answer, strange to say, was in the negative. The bodily illness was not to be permanently healed; but by God's help and strength Paul was enabled to rise above it, and to prove that pain and weakness can be so nobly endured that they form little, if any, hindrance to daily duty.

As soon as Paul was sufficiently recovered, he and his companions turned westward, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to continue their journey to the trading colonies along the shores of the Black Sea. So, feeling their way, and wondering where God's guidance would lead them, the three men came one day to the seaport of Troas, and looked down on the town that had been the scene of such fierce fighting many years ago. But Paul's thoughts were not with the past. From where they stood, the Isles of Greece could be seen dotting the blue Mediterranean Sea, and beyond stretched the Continent of Europe in its dense heathen darkness.

Rome and Greece, with their marvellous civiliza-

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tion and luxury, their buildings, statues, pictures and books, still worshipped Jupiter, Juno, Mercury and Diana, and all the hosts of lesser gods. Britain, Germany and the distant north, fierce, ignorant and savage, fell down before Odin and Thor, or worshipped the gods of the sun and moon, the sea and woods. The future of Europe hung in the balance as Paul lingered wonderingly at Troas.

A dream settled his suspense, a dream so vivid that it sent him next morning to the harbour-side among the ships that carried on the west-bound trade. In his dream he saw a man of Macedonia who stood and besought him to come over to help him and his countrymen. This, then, was God's plan, the next move in his life-work.

Without a moment's unnecessary delay the journey by sailing ship from Troas was arranged.

Three had journeyed down to Troas from the interior of Asia Minor, but four went on, for Luke, the "beloved physician" and the writer of the Acts, joined Paul at this crisis. Of Luke's former history we know nothing, though report has it that he was a native of Antioch.

So God in His goodness softened His answer to Paul's request. No permanent cure was to be his, but with Luke as friend and constant companion, a doctor's care would be always his.

"Come over and help us," was the cry of Europe. But what help was it that they needed? Not help

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in becoming wise. The schools and colleges of Greece taught learning far beyond the Jewish schools. Not help to become rich or strong or powerful. Rome with her iron rule and strict discipline had won for herself wealth and power beyond anything the Jews had ever dreamt of. But there was one thing that neither Greek nor Roman possessed, and that was real happiness. Pleasures they had in abundance, but of real soul-satisfying happiness they knew nothing, because they knew not God. That was what they needed—the knowledge of the Saviour, whose best and most wonderful name is Love.

On a day when the wind blew favourably from the south, the ship set sail, touching at the island of Samothracia for the night and reaching Neapolis on the day following. There the four friends disembarked and proceeded to Philippi.

CHAPTER XVIII

PHILIPPI

YEARS before Paul and his companions reached Philippi, the province of Macedonia, of which it was the capital, had been conquered by the Romans. It now formed part of that huge Empire which stretched from Britain in the west to Palestine and Syria in the east; from what we to-day call Germany in the north to Egypt and Carthage in the south. What Rome had once conquered, that Rome did her best to hold.

The conquest of Britain gives a good example of their methods. They did not attempt to destroy the Britains off the face of the land as the Saxons did later on, not because they were softer-hearted, but because their aims were different. The Saxons wanted a fresh home for their growing population; the Romans wanted world domination. Therefore, as soon as sufficient victories had ensured their object, they made friends with the defeated inhabitants, taught them what they knew of metals,

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building and handicrafts, and respected their customs and religion. Above all, they imposed on subject peoples the Roman code of law, a code upon which all law has been subsequently built. From the conquered countries they drew recruits for their enormous armies which policed the whole known world.

After a time, the conquered races settled down to live peaceably under this firm wise rule, partly because they knew rebellion to be useless, and partly because they had begun to appreciate the improvement in daily life which it gave them. Then it was that Rome withdrew her vast armies (which by that time were needed elsewhere), leaving only garrisons of Roman soldiers posted in the most important towns of the conquered country or province. Their duty was to keep order, deal out Roman justice to the inhabitants, and put down any attempt at rebellion with a stern hand. Where these garrisons were posted, Roman merchants and tradespeople also came, so that the town became known as a colony.

Philippi was such a place. Roman officials drove proudly to and fro along its thoroughfares; Roman police, named lictors, paraded the streets with their rods of office.

There was no synagogue at Philippi when Paul reached the city. This was a period of persecution for the Jews, and the few Jews who were there met

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quietly for prayer when Saturday came outside the town in a secluded spot beside the river. There the four friends joined them. Their presence must have been very noticeable at the little outdoor service, where the worshippers were mostly women.

Among these was one who was not a Jewess, though she believed in the God of the Jews, and looked with them for the promised Saviour. Lydia was a native of Thyatira, a town in the west of Asia Minor, famous to this day for the manufacture of a purple dye. Lydia herself had a large interest in the trade of purple cloth and silk. Her business had prospered so much that she had found it necessary to establish a depôt at Philippi, where her bales could be stored for overland transport to the towns of Greece. The wives of the Roman officials no doubt also bought largely of her goods. She was therefore well-to-do, a capable shrewd woman with a good position and large connection; an influence for good among her household and the townsfolk.

Paul's wonderful preaching caught her attention. She listened eagerly to all he had to say, and the Gospel of Love found a ready welcome in her generous warm-hearted nature. There by the riverside, under the open sky, she received baptism, and her whole household followed her example.

She became Paul's best friend in Philippi, for she insisted that he and his companions should

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leave their lodgings, and become her guests during the remainder of their stay. Paul was loath at first to inflict such a burden on a busy household, but Lydia would take no refusal. The change was made, and comfort and consideration, love and gratitude, surrounded the four wanderers from that time onward.

Lydia was not the only woman in that place to whom Paul's presence proved a blessing. There was a poor slave-girl there who was possessed by an evil spirit. Her masters had discovered that in certain moods, and when strongly under the hidden powers of darkness, the girl could be made to tell fortunes and predict the future with uncanny accuracy. With utter unscrupulousness, they had no hesitation in making use of her knowledge to gain money from the curious and superstitious.

Like the other devil-possessed, whom Jesus had healed, she recognized Paul and his three companions as servants of the Most High God.

Following them from day to day as they went about the streets, she proclaimed this fact aloud for all to hear. But Paul did not seek the testimony of devils. Grieved at her persistence, he turned one day upon her, and in the name of Jesus Christ commanded the evil spirit to come out of her. And the young girl was healed immediately—no longer devil-led, driven here and there at the impulse of wicked spirits and speaking at their prompting,

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but sane as you and I, free to choose good or evil by the light of her own reason and judgment. What a blessed change! But her masters did not think so. It was the secret knowledge of the devil that had made her so valuable to them, and upon which they had grown rich. Now she was of no more worth than the ordinary slave-girl, whose market value is merely a matter of bodily strength and beauty.

They cared nothing for the girl, only for their loss of income. Utterly selfish, utterly heartless, they were furious with Paul for his interference, and resolved to pay him out. Knowing quite well how much the Jews were hated by the Romans just then, they felt quite sure of their revenge. All they had to do was to drag these men before the Roman magistrates, accuse them vaguely of making a disturbance, and leave popular feeling to do the rest.

No sooner thought of than done. Paul and Silas were easily caught, the townspeople as easily roused to fury against them.

"These men are Jews," they shouted, "and tell us to do things which are not lawful for us to do, being a Roman colony."

The judges waited for no evidence, allowed the Christians no trial or defence. Then and there they commanded the lictors to strip off their clothes and beat them with their rods. Roman justice had no mercy or pity about it. It was no

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uncommon thing for men to die beneath the Roman scourgings. Scarred and bleeding the two friends were taken to the prison and committed to the care of the jailor. "Take especial care of these men" was his charge. I think the jailor was surprised. These men did not look like dangerous criminals, but having received such a message he had no choice. He led them to the inner dungeon, and fastened their feet in the stocks so that any movement was impossible. There he left them in the damp and cold and dark, caring nothing for their discomfort and pain.

But One cared and saw, One whose eyes can pierce the darkest night, and whose love can soften the most hardened conscience.

The keeper of the prison lay down and slept, but the great Keeper, who "slumbers not nor sleeps," was in His loving-kindness watching over jailor and prisoners.

Anxiety for their friends must have kept Luke and Timothy awake that night, and who can doubt that they spent the long hours in fervent prayer along with Lydia and her household? There was no sleep either for Paul or Silas. The pain and stiffness of their wounds prevented this without the added cramping horror of the stocks. But they could and did pray; and with prayer came not only "quietness and assurance," but also joy and thanksgiving.

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At midnight the other prisoners heard strange sounds through the thickness of the prison walls, sounds they had never heard before in that place of dread and sorrow. Moans and cries and shrieks they were accustomed to, but never had they listened to songs of praise. Who were these unknown singers? What could it mean?

And while they wondered a mighty earthquake shook the prison to its very foundations. All the locked and barred doors flew open wide, and every one's chains and shackles fell loose upon the ground.

The jailor, awakened out of sleep by the earthquake, jumped hurriedly out of bed, and seeing the prison doors all gaping wide, seized a sword and would have committed suicide, naturally thinking that all the prisoners had escaped. A voice out of the darkness checked him just in time. "Do thyself no harm," it called, "for we are all here."

A light was quickly kindled, and the trembling jailor flung himself at the feet of Paul and Silas. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" he cried.

Had there been something the evening before in these men's quiet endurance of pain and shame that had set the jailor wondering; or had he too heard rumours of the message they had come to bring? His question seemed to imply it.

Paul's answer came clear and ringing: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." And there and then, beneath that prison roof, Paul preached the good

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tidings of great joy, and the jailor learnt for the first time that love and gentleness, pity and sympathy, are stronger than force and cruelty.

I think we may be sure that the other prisoners were present at this sermon, as well as the jailor's household. That, finding themselves free and unfettered, these criminals made no attempt at escape was a miracle in itself. They were under the spell of that wonderful compelling influence which later on was able to control the panic of a shipwrecked crew.

The first effect on the jailor was a softening of his whole nature. He suddenly realized the plight of the disciples, and quickly fetching water bathed the horrible weals left by the lictors' rods. Baptism followed, one and all in that Roman household entering into the Christian Church. The jailor now could not do enough for his prisoners. To release them from captivity was beyond his power; that would have meant his instant execution for neglect of duty. Nor would the Apostles have accepted freedom at such a price. But food and comfort he could provide, and the rest of the night was spent in happy intercourse. There was so much to hear, so much to learn.

Early in the morning a strange message came to the prison gates from the Roman magistrates of the town.

"Let those men go."

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It looked as if the night of terror had frightened the stern Roman judges too, and that in some way they connected it with the case that had come before them the preceding day. The jailor hastened to tell the good news to Paul.

“You are free, my friends, free to go in safety ; now therefore depart quickly in peace.”

But Paul was of another mind. He asked to see the bearers of the message and gave the astonished sergeants this answer :

“The judges have had us beaten before the town without trial, and have imprisoned us without justice, and now they wish to get rid of us in secret. Not so. We are Roman citizens, and as such can demand fair play. If the magistrates wish us to go, let them come themselves and fetch us out publicly.”

Paul and Silas had, of course, not been born in Rome itself, but Paul at any rate had the standing of a free-born Roman citizen (Acts xxii. 28).

The sergeants carried back Paul's message, and the Roman judges were very much afraid. To punish any one without trial was against the law, but to punish a Roman citizen thus was an offence which might bring beggary and even death upon them. There was nothing for it but to cast themselves upon the mercy of these prisoners. So in fear and haste they went to the prison themselves, and publicly set Paul and Silas free, bringing them

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out into the streets and begging them to leave the city as soon as possible. This the Apostles seem to have promised to do. But first they returned to Lydia's house, where they found Luke and Timothy, and having seen all the Christian brethren they "comforted them and departed," leaving Luke and Timothy behind for the time at Philippi to carry on the good work in that town.

CHAPTER XIX

THESSALONICA AND ATHENS

IT must have been a great grief to Paul to leave Philippi where he had found such generous and warm-hearted friends. We have only to read his letter to the Philippians to see how much he appreciated their love and care for him, for unlike the Galatian Church, which so soon slipped back into error and superstition, the Philippians caused Paul no anxiety or sorrow. I suspect this was largely due to Luke, whose kindness and gentleness of character had won him the name of "the beloved physician." His loyalty and devotion to his friend would make Paul's reputation absolutely safe in his hands, and he could tell them anecdotes about the great Apostle that they would never have heard from the lips of the chief actor.

Journeying southwards and westwards, Paul and Silas passed rapidly through Amphipolis and Apollonia till they came to Thessalonica, the capital city of Macedonia. Here they found a Jewish synagogue. Now, Paul had been chosen by God

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Himself for a special mission to the Gentiles, yet he never left out his own countrymen. They were still God's chosen people. Their failure to recognize the Messiah when He came, and their treatment of Him did not alter that fact. Jesus on the Cross prayed "Father, forgive them," and who can doubt that His thoughts took in not only the Roman soldiers, stolidly obedient to their orders, but also His own nation, who had plotted His destruction. *His* yearning pity never changed. Jerusalem and Judæa first, He had told His disciples just before He left them, and not one of them ever forgot it. Whatever the danger, whatever the difficulty, their motto was always "to the Jew first."

And yet even to-day the least popular of all missions is the mission to the Jews. While looking back through history we see the strange spectacle of Christian nations showing their devotion to Christ by persecuting His own peculiar people. Of course they are hard to convert. It is always more difficult to persuade a rich man to accept somebody else's robe than the ragged beggarman. But there is one unfailing argument that appeals in a special manner to the Jew alone, and that is the combined weight of all the Old Testament prophecies.

That was the argument that Paul used at Thessalonica when the Sabbath Day came round, and he attended the synagogue service.

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The result was much as it had been in all his former labours. A few of the Jews believed, many of the "chief women," and a great multitude of the Greeks, and it was as usual the unbelieving Jews who were at the bottom of the disturbance that followed.

The preachers were lodging in Thessalonica with a cousin of Paul's named Jason. One day a mob collected round the house, throwing stones and yelling for Paul and Silas to be delivered over to them. At last they broke the door open, only to find that the two they sought were not there, Jason having probably contrived their escape in time. Enraged at their failure, the crowd seized Jason himself and a few of the newly made Christians, and dragged them before the town council.

"Jason is lodging these men who have come to our town to preach disturbance. They are turning the world upside down, saying that there is another king besides Cæsar whom they call Jesus."

This accusation frightened the rulers. In that conquered country they lived under the Roman thumb, and knew how small a thing sufficed to bring down Roman punishment on innocent and guilty alike. How could they know that the Kingdom of Jesus would never endanger the dominion of any earthly potentate? But frightened though they were, they had too much common sense

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to punish innocent townspeople ; so they contented themselves with making Jason responsible for keeping the peace in future, and let them go.

Poor Jason ! There was only one way for him to ensure this, and that was to send away his friends. Hurriedly searching out Paul and Silas he discussed the situation with them, and that very night while the town slept the Christian brethren "sent away Paul and Silas" to the neighbouring town of Berea, where Timothy rejoined them.

Here they had a much more ready welcome and were gladly heard, the Jews searching their Old Testament scriptures to prove for themselves the truth of Paul's statements. Everything went well, until news of the success of Paul's preaching reached Thessalonica, and stirred up once more the rage of his enemies. They hurried down to Berea intent on mischief, nor were they long in getting to work. Truth and falsehood cunningly intermixed soon did their work, and the Christians, anxious—over-anxious maybe—for Paul's safety, persuaded him to accept their escort as far as Athens. Fortunately for Berea the fury of the Jews was concentrated almost entirely on the one man, so that it was possible for Silas and Timothy to remain behind in comparative safety.

Jesus had told His disciples, "If they persecute you in one city, flee to another." He had warned them in His loving forethought what treatment

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they must expect, and by His own example had shown them that prudent avoidance of danger is not always cowardice. But at the time of Paul's flight from Berea, neither of the Gospels had been written, and I do not think he had ever heard his Master's advice. It would have cheered him, and have saved him from the deep depression which was so soon to fall upon his usually buoyant nature.

At Athens the Berean Christians left Paul, returning to their own town with an urgent message to Silas and Timothy to rejoin him "with all speed." For the time he was absolutely alone. Since leaving Tarsus he had been in close and intimate daily intercourse with friends sharing the same faith and interests. He was a man to whom city life and the hum and movement of crowds were as natural as the breath he drew, but so far he had never experienced the appalling loneliness of a great city. His heart, too, lay behind in Macedonia. Would the infant Churches that he had been obliged to leave so hurriedly be able to stand alone? Would their faith stand the test of persecution? He tried "once and again" to return to them, but "Satan hindered" him (1 Thess. ii. 18).

But Paul could not be idle, even though ill and out of heart. Athens, with all its wonderful buildings, its statues, its altars and shrines to false gods, stirred his heart not to admiration but to pity. Here was a city wrapped in luxury, full

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of idlers and pleasure-seekers, whose chief aim in life seemed to be to find some new amusement, some new sensation. Idolaters all !

His spirit was stirred, and in Jewish synagogue, street and market-place he preached Jesus to all who would stop to listen. In the midst of so many idols and false gods, what did one or two more or less matter ? The people were weary of gods and goddesses, and seem to have taken a very languid interest in Paul's preaching. But at last the doctrine of the Resurrection caught their attention ; this at least was strange and out of the common, and promised a sensation. Anxious to hear more on this subject, the Athenians invited Paul to explain himself more clearly in their great court on the Hill of Mars, where, free from the coming and going of the market-place, all might sit and listen in comfort. It was the opening that Paul had longed for.

"Men of Athens," he said, "as I walked along your streets I saw many altars with people worshipping and burning incense before them ; altars to Jupiter and Minerva, altars to Virtue and Pity, and hundreds of others. But by and by, as I passed along I found in one street an altar with this strange title over it : 'To the Unknown God.' That is the God I have come to tell you about, the God whom you do not know and yet worship at this shrine. This is the God Who made the universe and

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all that it contains, Whose son Jesus came into the world to teach men to repent, for assuredly one day there will be a great judging of all who have lived in this world, when all shall rise from the dead."

Paul's speech was here interrupted by gusts of laughter and jeers of derision.

"A resurrection of the dead ! We cannot believe that. This man must be mad to preach such nonsense !" they cried. Some of the more polite of his hearers added : " We would like to hear you some other time about this matter," but Paul saw that there was no real desire behind their remark.

Paul was accustomed to opposition ; he had met it in varying forms wherever he had carried his Lord's message, but he had never yet, so far as we know, encountered incredulous amusement. It silenced him more completely than stones and insults would have done.

As he left the Hill of Mars, smarting under a sense of failure, he heard steps behind him, and looking round saw a little group of men and women hurrying after him. Dionysius, the Areopagite Counsellor, and the woman named Damaris are only names to us, but they must have been a very present help in time of trouble to poor Paul. These two, and a few other unnamed Athenians, clung to him and became regular inquirers. They made Athens possible to the great Apostle while he waited impatiently for his friends.

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Then Timothy turned up alone, having come on from Berea as soon as he could after receiving Paul's message.

What a lot the two had to discuss and hear !

" Why is Silas not with you ? How are the Berean brethren ? Have the Thessalonian Jews been giving you any further trouble ? Have you news of Luke from Philippi ? "

These and a hundred questions like them must have poured from Paul's lips, and the answers he received decided his course of action. True, he longed for Timothy's companionship and support more than ever, but the need of the Thessalonian Church was greater. They had, it seemed, been passing through bad times (1 Thess. iii. 1-5). Persecution and opposition had arisen at once, and Paul feared lest the faith of his converts there would not bear the test, especially as they had had so little teaching, so little preparation for the cross-bearing that is part of a Christian's duty. So Timothy was dispatched at once, armed with messages of comfort and encouragement, and Paul settled down once more to a period of waiting. We do not know how long he gave Timothy for this special mission, but as the weeks passed by a restlessness seized on him. Any long delay in the arrival of Silas and Timothy might mean, he knew, the imprisonment and death of either, and he was torn with anxiety on their behalf. He had not

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enough to do to take his mind off his own perplexities, so he suddenly changed his plans and decided to leave for Corinth. One of his few friends at Athens would give the wanderers the message when they turned up.

CHAPTER XX

THE LONG STAY AT CORINTH

PAUL reached Corinth in safety, but here he found himself in actual want (2 Cor. xi. 9).

His stock of money was almost if not quite exhausted, and until his friends arrived he could not expect any fresh supplies. He was ill, too, in body, and depressed in spirit. The vision of the man of Macedonia had probably prepared him for a great and startling success, while the reality had been a series of disappointments. Obligated to slink away in stealth from town after town, leaving his subordinates to carry on his unfinished work, he may well have wondered why God had sent him into Europe if this was to be the outcome of it all.

Elijah of old had felt the same feeling of hopelessness, only in a far stronger degree. He had left his work to flee into the wilderness, meaning to die there of hunger and thirst. Paul stuck to his task disheartened and discouraged. And to both men God came. The "still small voice" found Elijah in the desert, and sent him back to

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work, never to falter again till the whirlwind took him to heaven ; and the same voice came to Paul with a message of encouragement not long after he reached Corinth.

Perhaps Paul's empty purse was a blessing in disguise, since it forced him to seek means of replenishing it, and so took his thoughts off his troubles. Luckily he was not destitute of resources. Every Jewish parent, however rich he might be, had his son taught some trade or handicraft, and in his boyhood's days Paul had learnt in Tarsus how to make sail-cloth for tents. His search for employment through the streets of Corinth brought him at length to the workshop of Aquila. The latter, himself a refugee from Rome, had passed through the difficulties of starting a business in a strange city, and was glad enough of extra help.

This filled the week-days with toil, and while the two men bent over the weaving of their goat's-hair tent-cloth, Paul would tell Aquila some of the wonderful experiences he had passed through, and how he had become a servant of that Jesus Whose followers he had once so bitterly persecuted.

Aquila and his wife Priscilla grew to love the great Apostle, and by degrees they too came to believe in Jesus as the Son of God. This hard work to procure his daily bread and to pay for his lodging at Aquila's house prevented Paul from doing much preaching. It was only when the tools and tent-

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cloth were neatly put away on Friday evening that he was free for his greater work. Every Sabbath found him in the synagogue, persuading, proving, reasoning, both with Jew and Greek, but the heart and spirit were lacking, and little success attended his preaching.

Then Silas and Timothy arrived, having pressed on from Athens as fast as possible. They brought good news. The Christians of Thessalonica were standing firm in the faith. This assurance lifted an enormous weight off Paul's heart. The fact that his friends had also brought a gift of money from his converts was an added joy, since it showed the sincerity of their love, and it would free him to a great extent for daily preaching. No wonder Paul was cheered. His depression vanished like mist before the sun, and he became his own zealous self again. His preaching, too, increased suddenly in vigour, with the result that Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house.

About this time Paul left his lodging in the house of Aquila, and took up his abode quite close to the synagogue with a man named Justus. It is likely that the tent-maker's house would not accommodate two extra men, and Paul would naturally wish to have his friends with him, and to be nearer the centre of his work.

We may be sure that he often returned to work

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in Aquila's workshop, since we read that during all that long stay in the town, he took no charity from any of the Corinthian Christians (2 Cor. xi. 9).

It was while he was in the house of Justus that a further encouragement came to him. One night in a vision the Lord spoke to him. "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee, for I have much people in this city."

Does this message seem to hint at some lurking and hidden fear in that bravest of brave hearts? It seems so, and how natural if it were so! Joshua no doubt needed the reiterated injunction, "Be strong and very courageous," to brace his nerves for the stupendous task of settling a nation in a hostile and occupied land; and do we not all need the Master's assurance, "It is I, be not afraid"?

Corinth was acknowledged by the historians of those days to be the wickedest city in the world, the most appallingly immoral. Paul had seen vice and cruelty and hideous heathen practices at Antioch, but Antioch was white compared to Corinth. It was good for him to know that even here Jesus had "much people." Eighteen months of steady work did Paul and his fellow-helpers put in at Corinth, unharassed by mob-violence or active opposition. The two Epistles to the Corinthians show us what a splendid result their preaching had, and how well and truly the Church there was

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founded before Paul felt called upon to revisit the smaller Churches.

One little incident towards the end of his stay showed him how true was God's promise : " No man shall set on thee to hurt thee." A new Roman official had been sent to Corinth by the Emperor Claudius, Gallio by name. He was a wise and kindly man, with a calm and even temper. The Jews, ignorant of his character, saw in his arrival a chance of venting their hatred of Paul and his teaching. Following their usual policy of keeping themselves as much as possible in the background, they roused a mob, who caught hold of the unresisting Apostle, and brought him before Gallio's judgment-seat. But here they were faced with a difficulty. There had been no political disturbance or town riot that they could accuse Paul of having started. The only accusation they could think of sounded weak even in their own ears.

" This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."

Paul was just about to answer this charge, when Gallio rose quietly from his seat.

" I decline to have anything to do with this matter," he said decidedly ; " I am here to judge lawlessness, crime and wrong-doing, not to decide questions of words and names and little squabbles about your own worship. These are things for you to settle among yourselves."

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Disappointed and snubbed, the Jews retired crestfallen, knowing that here in a Greek city under Roman rule they had no power to punish and imprison Paul as they would have liked to have done. But they were not to get off so easily. The Greek sympathizers with Paul, seeing from Gallio's attitude that he was no friend to the spiteful Jews, dragged Sosthenes, who was now chief ruler of the synagogue in the place of Crispus, before the seat of judgment. There they proceeded to beat him. But if they thought to win Gallio's praise, they too were quite mistaken. The Consul sat calmly watching the scene, neither praising, blaming, nor interfering, caring apparently not one jot for Jewish malice or Greek violence, so long as neither was directed against Roman power and Roman law.

The result of this frustrated attempt against Paul was a greater safety for the Christian Church, and increased respect and honour for the preachers. His enemies had "set on" Paul, but he had not been "hurt," for God had brought the devices of his enemies to nothing.

It was some time after this deliverance that Paul felt impelled to return to Syria. Aquila and Priscilla were sailing for Ephesus, and he decided to go with them. We do not read whether Silas and Timothy accompanied him or not, but it is more likely that for the present they were left behind in

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Corinth. Paul was journeying with friends and going to friends, and would not need their companionship. Leaving Corinth after so many happy months spent there must have been a wrench to Paul's affectionate heart, but he was his Lord's bondman, bought with a price higher than that paid at any slave market, and no personal tie would hold him if he thought his Master's command was "Go."

The sea-voyage from Cenchrea, the seaport of Corinth, to Ephesus was accomplished in safety, the ship stopping there just long enough to enable Paul to preach once in the Jewish synagogue. His heart, however, was set upon reaching Jerusalem in time for the feast, so in spite of an invitation to remain longer in the city, he said good-bye, promising to return there again if it were God's will. He left Aquila and Priscilla behind in Ephesus, in which town they intended setting up their trade.

Of Paul's longed-for visit to Jerusalem we know nothing, but we read that, after he had saluted the Church there, he returned to Antioch, the starting-point of all his missionary journeys.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LONG STAY IN EPHESUS

WHO accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey we are not told, but we may be quite sure that he did not go alone. Timothy had probably joined him, as later on he and Erastus (a new name in the list of Paul's helpers) are mentioned. Silas we do not hear of again in Paul's company. Like Barnabas he found other fields of labour, and years later we read of him once more. He was then working with Peter in Babylon (1 Peter v. 12), and was chosen by the latter to carry his first letter to the Christians scattered through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, all provinces of that part of south-western Asia that we now call Asia Minor. Silas, or to give him his full name, Silvanus, would have been recognized by many of those to whom he carried this letter, indeed he was probably chosen for that very reason.

Paul started his third journey as he had his second. He re-visited all his earliest Churches

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“in order”; everywhere inquiring into progress made, settling difficulties, warning against false teachers, rebuking, encouraging, confirming.

It was while Paul was busy at this quiet work in the interior of Asia Minor that a Christian Jew, named Apollos, arrived at Ephesus. Like Paul, he was both well educated and eloquent, fully acquainted with the Old Testament writings, and zealous to spread the knowledge of the truth. He had evidently learnt to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah from the preaching of John the Baptist or followers of his, and was ignorant of the fact, or at least the details, of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension. Aquila and Priscilla, who went to hear him preach, were quick to notice that he had no knowledge of much that Paul had taught them as necessary to their faith, and realizing what a power for good Apollos already was, they invited him to their house, and there quietly explained to him the “way of God more perfectly” (Acts xviii. 26). It speaks much for Apollos that he so gladly learnt from the poor exiled tent-maker and his wife, thus showing that he possessed the real wisdom that has learnt how little it knows, and is content to learn from any source, however humble. “If only Paul were here, he could explain so much better than we,” must often have been upon the lips of husband and wife.

But Apollos and Paul were not destined to meet

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just yet. As Paul turned his steps towards Ephesus, Apollos left the town for Corinth, thus missing the great Apostle by a few short days.

We may feel sure that Paul's first act on reaching Ephesus was to look up his old friend Aquila. From him he learnt of all that had occurred since they parted, including an account of Apollos and his preaching.

"I wish I had seen him," we can imagine Paul saying; "but can you tell me if he baptized his disciples?"

"Oh yes, but I do not think he used the Master's words. You see, he only knew himself the baptism of John."

This was a matter for further inquiry, and investigation proved that the new converts had never even heard of the Holy Ghost. That unknown He had influenced and guided them we know, since—

"Every virtue we possess,
And every conquest won,
And every thought of holiness;
Are His alone."

But, now He was to become their recognized Guide and Lord. After further teaching, Paul re-baptized these men and women, and later laid his hands on them, and instantly was the Spirit's power both felt and seen, for they "spake with tongues and prophesied."

THE LONG STAY IN EPHEBUS

For three months Paul attended the services of the synagogue in Ephesus, but at the end of that time the opposition of some of the Jews made it necessary for him to seek a quieter place for his preaching. This he found in the lecture-room of a man named Tyrannus. His disciples followed him there, and gradually the Church of Ephesus grew, till at the end of two years "all" (Acts xix. 10) had heard the news of the Saviour, "both Jews and Greeks." And not only was this the case in Ephesus itself, but in the province of which it was the chief city.

Opposition came at last, as it always did, but this time in a different guise. Ephesus was the proud possessor of one of the seven wonders of the world. Its marvellous Temple of Diana stood on the level marshy ground near the harbour and covered twice the space of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. It contained hundreds of columns of marble and jasper, besides paintings, jewels, carving, statues and treasures of every description. The image of Diana itself, which was said to have fallen down from the sky, was not beautiful. It was a roughly made and shapeless wooden figure, more like the hideous image of Buddha worshipped in India than the wonderful statues of Greek gods at Athens and Corinth. But ugly as it was, it was the chief object of worship in Ephesus, and little miniature copies of the image were sold by the

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hundred to townsfolk and visitors alike. Even where actual belief in the deity of Diana was waning, her image was still held to possess power as a charm to ward off evil from the purchaser. The merchants of amulets and mascots naturally found it pay to foster such superstitions, since wherever there is this ignorant belief in magic, there will always be found people who take advantage of it for their own gain. Ephesus was full of magicians and wonder-workers, each with some new trick or conjuring device to gain popularity and reap a harvest.

It was here, in this town of magic, that God worked "special miracles" by the hands of Paul, just as hundreds of years before by the hands of Moses "His wonders had been shown" in that wonder-working mysterious land of Egypt. In both cases the magicians had stood by and watched a power they could not understand. But there was this difference between the two cases. The miracles in Egypt were signs of God's power and might, the miracles at Ephesus were signs of His mercy and loving-kindness. In Egypt the object of the plagues had been to fill the hearts of Pharaoh and his people with fear and terror; in Ephesus God sought to lead souls to Himself. After the great day of Pentecost, Peter's shadow falling on the sick as he passed along the streets had been enough with faith to heal disease; now all that was necessary

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in some cases was an article of Paul's clothing, one of the aprons he wore at his tent-making, or the handkerchief he had wiped his heated forehead with.

Gradually the shrewd Ephesian citizens began to compare the quiet ease of Paul's healings with the elaborate charms and remedies of the magicians. It was during this change of opinion that an event occurred which brought further conviction to the townsfolk. Seven Jewish brothers arrived in the city, seven more magicians and tricksters. These men wandered from place to place, trading on the ignorance of the poorer people, and pretending among other things to have the power to cast out devils. They took care never to stay long enough in one place to be found out as impostors, and made a good living out of the friends of the poor sufferers.

One day they were present when Paul cast out an evil spirit, and were quick to notice the words he used and the success of the healing.

"A new charm," they thought, "and one that we can use as well as he."

So next time their services were called for, they went up to the sick man's bedroom prepared to use this new method.

"We command you to come out of this man in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches."

But Satan knows the real from the false.

"Jesus I know and Paul I know," the devil-possessed replied; "but who are ye?"

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And with the strength of madness the man leapt up and flung himself upon the seven. Such was the fury of the attack that the brothers had to fly for their lives, bruised and wounded and with their clothes literally torn off their backs. This happened in broad daylight, and the news spread like wildfire through the town, producing a great effect on all the townspeople, and especially on many of the other false magicians and wonder-workers. These were honest enough to confess their tricks publicly and to bring charms and mascots, and books of black art and magic to the Apostle. It would be interesting now to know what mysteries these latter contained, but Paul made quick work of them. In the sight of "all men" a bonfire was made, into which all the magicians' stock-in-trade was cast. Books in those days were of great value, being hand-written on rolls of parchment, and it is calculated that this bonfire destroyed nearly two thousand pounds' worth of evil. Such a sacrifice showed clearly the sincerity of the conjurers' change of heart.

It was not long after this event that Paul began to plan a tour of Macedonia and Greece. From the Epistle to the Corinthians we find a hint of a second short visit to Corinth not mentioned by Luke in the Acts (2 Cor. xii. 14, 21 and xiii. 1). Whether this visit was only talked about and planned or actually took place is not quite

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clear ; but it would have been a simple matter to arrange, as there was a direct trade-route by sea between Ephesus and Corinth (Cenchrea).

Intercourse between the two mercantile cities was carried on as regularly as seasons and weather permitted, and it was by this means that Paul obtained news of the Corinthian Church. Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, three of his own disciples, stepped ashore one day at Ephesus, and made their way to the Apostle's dwelling. They brought bad news. The Corinthian Christians had fallen back into the sins of a town where public opinion had long ceased to be shocked by deeds that were openly practised as a matter of course.

But these things could not be allowed in a professing Christian. No man or woman can belong to Christ who is wilfully choosing to live a life of selfishness and self-indulgence, and the Corinthian disciples had to learn that their bodies as well as their spirits were Christ's, and that both body and spirit must be kept clean and controlled and pure for the Master's service.

Paul found it necessary to write them a very stern letter of rebuke, a letter that has been lost to us (1 Cor. v. 9). Now he was preparing for his third * visit to Corinth, one which he promised should not be a passing one, but a lengthened stay

* If Paul carried out his projected visit from Ephesus, it could only have been of short duration.

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amongst them. But Paul could not bear the thought of coming to them in anger. He knew quite well what difficulties they had to face, and he wished to give them time to repent and to put their own house in order before he came. So the letter that we know as the First Epistle to the Corinthians was written, a letter of love and pain, of pleading and gentle reproaches. The brethren who had brought the report to Ephesus were returning, and with them Paul sent his own special messenger. Apollos, who had lately returned also to Ephesus, and whom Paul had met and learnt to trust, would have been the best man for enforcing Paul's letter of rebuke. He was now well known in Corinth and his learning and position would carry weight. But Apollos had other plans; indeed, he seems always to have acted as a free lance, and never to have placed himself in the slightest degree under Paul's guidance (1 Cor. xvi. 12). Timothy, too, seems not to have been immediately available for the mission (1 Cor. xvi. 10), and the matter was pressing. Paul therefore chose Titus, the young man who had accompanied him and Barnabas to Jerusalem several years before. Events showed that he could not have chosen a more able messenger.

Meanwhile Paul's own plans began to take shape. As soon as the Feast of Pentecost was over, he would set out on his intended tour of the Mace-

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donian Churches. Timothy, now free for service, and Erastus, a Corinthian Christian, were sent on ahead to announce his speedy arrival and to make a collection for the poor Christians of Jerusalem.

It was while Paul waited in Ephesus for the Feast of Pentecost that the gathering discontent and anger of the guild of silversmiths rose to a head. The growth of Christianity in and around the town had made a serious difference to their business. The demand for charms and amulets had almost ceased, and even the models of Diana and of her temple no longer sold as readily as they used to do. Demetrius, one of their number, was the first to take action. Calling his fellow-workers together he explained to them the reason for their loss of trade, and roused their religious zeal by hinting that their wonderful temple with its image of Diana was in danger of being despised and even destroyed. This idea at once roused the citizens, and they caught Gaius and Aristarchus, two more of Paul's companions, and dragged them into the theatre, a building which was used for all public gatherings, and which was the largest in the world. As before in Thessalonica, Paul escaped the excited search of the mob. Later on, when he would have joined his friends in the theatre, the disciples held him back ; even the chief men of the city sending him secretly a friendly message not to risk appearing himself at this crisis.

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The greater number of the people, who had flocked after the silversmiths into the building, had no notion what was the cause of the uproar, and were utterly confused when they tried to find out. Some shouted one explanation, some another, and for a time the hubbub and noise were prodigious. At last one idea seems to have got into the heads of the townsfolk. The Jews were at the bottom of some attempt against their worship. Now, the Jews did not at all like being mixed up in a tumult which did not concern them, and they put a man named Alexander forward as their spokesman. Alexander stood up and raised his hand to gain a hearing, but the sight of his Jewish face and dress was enough to renew the commotion. "Great is Diana! Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" the people shouted over and over again. Alexander was glad enough to descend from his prominent position and lose himself in the crowd, thankful that the anger of the people so far confined itself to tumult and uproar. It was not until two hours had elapsed, and lungs and voices were getting exhausted, that the "town clerk," or chief town official, had a chance to quiet the disturbance.

"Men of Ephesus," he said, "the whole world knows that Ephesus is the humble slave and worshipper of the great goddess Diana, whose image fell down from Jupiter. It is a fact that cannot

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be denied. These men whom you have dragged here are not thieves, attempting to steal the treasures of our temple, nor have they spoken evil against the goddess. But if Demetrius and the other silversmiths think that they have any grievance against any person, the law-courts are open, and the judges even now sitting. They can take their case before them to be judged in a proper and legal manner. I warn you that an uproar such as this may bring down the wrath and punishment of Rome upon us, especially as there is no sufficient excuse by which we can explain this riotous meeting. I advise you all to go quietly home and think over what I have said."

Impressed by the simple dignity and shrewd common-sense of this speech, the people slunk shamefacedly away, leaving the great theatre empty and deserted. That same evening, in the house of Aquila or of some other Christian, Paul called his friends around him for a last farewell. The time had come, for Ephesus would undoubtedly quiet down better without him.

CHAPTER XXII

“THE CARE OF ALL THE CHURCHES”

PAUL left Ephesus with a heavy heart. True, the Church there had been firmly established, but the news from Galatia and Corinth was black indeed. Sin and error had crept in, and false doctrine was already being taught and accepted as truth. How had Titus and his own letter of rebuke been received at Corinth? Paul could only pray and long for news. Probably too his distress of mind had affected his bodily health, never too robust, so that he had to fight physical weakness as well as depression of spirit.

He made his way northwards to Troas, hoping there to find Titus returning with news from Greece (2 Cor. ii. 12, 13). But Titus was not there, nor did he arrive while Paul waited impatiently for him, growing ever more restless as the days went by with no sign or word of the missing messenger. One grain of comfort was the warm welcome given him by the people of Troas. This at any other time might have influenced Paul to use

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the opening thus given him “ by the Lord,” and to have stayed some time in the town. But harassed with doubt and torn by anxiety, he was not in a fit state for giving his whole attention to the forming of a new Church. Accordingly he left Troas and sailed across to Macedonia. At Philippi he was among his most warm-hearted and generous friends, and we can imagine the welcome he received from the merchant-lady Lydia and the jailor of the prison. Here too he picked up his “ beloved son in the Lord,” Timothy, and heard of the success of his mission. But nothing seems to have roused him from his fears and anxieties until at last Titus arrived with good news (2 Cor. vii. 5, 6)—Paul’s letter, backed by Titus’ persuasions, had awoken the Corinthian Church to shame and repentance. They had at once set about purifying their lives and conduct from the special sins that Paul had pointed out to them. But there were still some who were opposed to Paul, and who were spreading reports against him, hinting broadly that the collection he so much desired for the poor saints in Jerusalem was destined for his own pocket.

Paul was deeply hurt. Nor could he laugh the matter away; for although the accusation was ludicrously absurd and utterly false to facts, yet he knew that a falsehood constantly repeated often gets believed in at last. If this were the case,

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farewell to his influence in Corinth. He resolved to write the refractory Church one more letter before he himself followed it in person. But here he was confronted with the difficulty that meets every innocent person accused of wrong-doing. A simple denial of crime does not clear any one from suspicion. He could only fall back on the known facts of his former life to prove the improbability of the present accusation.

So in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians Paul reminds them of his first arrival in their city, and of how in absolute need he had worked in Aquila's workshop, resolved not to take charity from any man of them (2 Cor. xi. 8, 9). And this, not because he thought it wrong to accept help. On the contrary, he had accepted money gratefully from the generosity of the Philippian Church, who out of their poverty had contributed three times already to his maintenance. But he had foreseen the possibility of just such an accusation as the evil-minded members of the Corinthian Church had now made, namely, that he preached the Gospel for gain. From the first, therefore, he had made up his mind never to accept a penny, nor would he now. As for the collection for the poor, he had promised the heads of the Church at Jerusalem (Gal. ii. 10) to remember the extreme poverty of the Christians there, and to collect regularly for their relief from the richer and newer Churches. If

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they still doubted his honesty, they could send the money they had put aside by men chosen by themselves for that purpose; in fact, he had already suggested this plan in his former letter (1 Cor. xvi. 3).

Thus the letter that Paul wrote to Corinth was a mixture of praise and blame, of grateful joy in the well-doing of the majority, and of sorrowful rebuke for the unworthy suspicion the others had harboured against him. Once more Titus was chosen as the bearer; in fact, he volunteered for the mission “of his own accord.” The way in which his youth and inexperience had been received before by the Corinthians had awakened all the love and zeal of his earnest nature, so that he was keen to return. With him this time went “the brother whose praise is in the Gospels,” and who surely can have been no other than Luke the doctor, who both in the Acts and in his Gospel keeps himself so modestly in the background (2 Cor. viii. 17, 18).

Paul in the meantime remained behind, using Philippi as a centre for extensive missionary labour in the outlying districts. That during this time he journeyed far westwards across the Greek peninsula we learn from Romans xv. 19; in fact, we have to go to the Epistles for any details of Paul’s work in Europe during this third missionary journey, the account in Acts condensing it all into four or five short verses (Acts xx. 2-6).

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The longer Paul lived and worked, the stronger did the vast need of the heathen world press on his heart, so that already he was planning to visit Rome and even far-away Spain when he got the chance. Experience had taught him that his work lay more in clearing the ground and drawing out the plan for the structure, while to others fell the task of consolidating and building on the foundations he had so clearly laid down.

It was during the three months he spent at Corinth, whither in due time he followed Titus, that he wrote a long letter to the Church of Rome. This was the only Epistle Paul wrote to a Church not already visited by him, or by some of his accredited helpers, but Rome was not like other Churches. It was the centre of the great Roman Empire; the most important city in the world; and Paul already had many friends living there (Rom. xvi. 1-16), men and women who like Aquila and Priscilla had been driven away from Rome by persecution, only to return as soon as the storm was over.

What happened in Corinth during those three months we do not know, nor how Paul was received. His enemies, however, were getting increasingly venomous and dangerous, and although he was too well protected in Corinth itself for their plots against him to have any chance of success there, they had other designs in view. They knew

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that his plan was to return to Syria by sea, and on the way to Cenchrea, or at the port itself, there would certainly arise plenty of opportunities for seizing him. But their spite failed after all. Warned by the vigilance of his friends, Paul changed his route at the last moment, and while his foes watched the road to the coast, set off quietly with his companion along the inland road back to Macedonia (Acts xx. 3).

At Philippi Luke joined Paul for good, though we only know this from a change of pronoun in the writing of the story. Now it is no longer “ he went ” or “ they spoke,” but “ we went ” and “ we sailed.”

Seven other men chosen from different cities to carry their collection to Jerusalem, were to form, part of the party, but among these names is no representative from Corinth. Had that town in very shame decided to entrust their contribution to Paul's own hands ? It would be nice to think so. These seven were sent ahead to Troas, there to await Paul's arrival, while he and Luke lingered at Philippi for the Feast of the Passover. Perhaps already the certainty of coming evil, which grew stronger as he journeyed nearer to Jerusalem, told Paul that the chance of his ever seeing his Philippian friends again was very slight. And so he decided to spend the beautiful Christian Festival of Easter with those generous kindly townspeople, even if it meant hurrying the rest of his journey afterwards.

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The Festival over, Paul and Luke took the first opportunity that offered of sailing for Troas, where they rejoined the seven. A week's stay was necessary before berths on a vessel sailing to Patara could be procured. This ship would take them a great part of their way, and at Patara they hoped to find a trading vessel going to Palestine. The Lord's Day fell on the last before their start, and a large company of disciples collected in the "upper room" of some Christian's house to take the Lord's Supper and to hear Paul preach. The seven had not wasted their time while waiting at Troas, and the listeners were both eager and numerous.

Paul's heart was very full. He remembered how twice he had been driven from Troas, once by a vision and the second time by his own fears and anxieties, and now again the time was very short. How could he crowd all he wanted to say to them into that one short night? Quite unconscious of time or bodily fatigue, he stood hour after hour pouring out his soul in that crowded room with its many lights, until about midnight he was interrupted by a heavy thud and a cry of horror. A young man, named Eutychus, had perched himself on the window-ledge to listen. The room, despite the open window, was close and hot, and, tired by the labours of the day, he had gradually fallen fast asleep, nobody noticing his precarious position till it was too late.

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There was instantly a confused hubbub of voices and a wailing and wringing of hands. Many rushed to the window, and looking down saw dimly a motionless huddled form on the pavement below. Others hurried down the staircase to see what help they could render. Luke, as doctor, would have been one of the first on the spot. One glance was enough for his practised eye. But presently the voice of the preacher was heard asking for a passage through the crowd. In his inspired face was no fear, no consternation, no sorrow; only a burning steadfast faith. Like Elijah and Elisha of old, Paul stretched his living body over the motionless corpse, folding his arms about it (Acts xx. 10).

“ Trouble not yourselves, for his life is in him,” he said, rising to his feet. And as they watched, the blood rose to the pale cheeks, the eyes opened, and Eutychus sat up.

We can picture the excitement and joy of that little gathering, but they did not let these feelings steal away too much of the fleeting night. They had a juster sense of the true value of things than that. The restoration of Eutychus was indeed a matter for profound thankfulness, but Paul’s words were of vital importance both for time and for eternity. So with hearts full of gratitude they returned to the upper room, there to celebrate the great service of thanksgiving, and to listen to

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Paul till the light of early dawn crept over the eastern hills and warned them that day was approaching. Then the meeting reluctantly broke up, the Christians of Troas returning to their homes and daily toil, and Luke and the seven going on board the ship which was due to start early, so as to get the full advantage of the daylight.

Paul alone remained on shore, having planned to walk to Assos, at which port the vessel was calling. The distance along the Roman road was not great, and he evidently wished for solitude. He knew that he was about to face the great crisis of his life ; and even the bravest man has to fight a battle before he can conquer the natural shrinking that comes over our human nature at such times. Paul was no coward. The man who could sing hymns of praise in a damp dungeon with his back still stiff and bleeding from Roman rods ; the man who calmly returned to spend the night in the city that had just stoned him ; who would have faced the Ephesian mob if not held back, was certainly a hero. But Paul for all that was human. He had his bad times as we all have ; times when he found it hard to go forward trusting utterly and simply and leaving the future to God. Perhaps the thought of Christ's agony in the garden came to remind him that even the Master shrank from the cup He was called upon to drink, and received strength from heaven to carry Him through.

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The twenty-miles walk must have given Paul plenty of time for prayer, and with prayer came peace and assurance. Even if chains and sorrows awaited him, his inward serenity need never be destroyed. “When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” These words, and others like them, would have rung like music in his ears.

At Assos he rejoined the ship and his companions. In those days sailing craft kept close to shore, and this vessel was evidently touching at several places along the indented coast-line of Asia Minor. The ship-master had no business in Ephesus, but would have put in there had Paul especially desired to do so. But time was passing, and Paul’s great desire was to reach Jerusalem in time for the Feast of Pentecost. He therefore reluctantly decided not to delay the ship, though it must have cost him a pang of regret as he watched the houses and Temple recede in the distance, until the headland of Mycale shut them from his view.

But at Miletus his chance came. At that port the ship had to call to unload or to take in merchandise, and learning from the captain that it would be a considerable time in harbour, Paul dispatched a message to ask the Elders of the

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Church at Ephesus to meet him there. This summons was eagerly responded to. What were thirty miles or so of walking when at the end they would meet the man they loved and revered above all others? Many besides the heads of the Church would have joined the band of travellers.

Somewhere apart from others, along the shore or under some remote grove of trees, Paul met this company of faithful friends for the last time. Words must have been rushing to his lips; but even now the ship was making ready in the bay for a speedy start, and he knew he must be very short. Very briefly he reminded them of how his own daily life had been spent during his three-years' stay among them. Now he was going to Jerusalem, not knowing what treatment he was likely to meet, but certain, from the warnings of the Holy Ghost, that somewhere, and at some time, imprisonment and afflictions were waiting for him.

"It is not that I value my life so highly," he added, "or regret being called upon to lay it down when my race has been run, and my work completed. It is my dear Churches that I grieve to leave, and I know that neither Ephesus nor any of the other places around where I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God, shall ever see my face again. You will have to stand alone. Take care, then, and watch lest false teachers creep into the Church of which the Holy Spirit has made you the

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heads. I can but leave you in God's care, sure that His grace is able to finish the work that I have only begun.”

His address ended, Paul knelt down and prayed for them all ; and hearts grew very full and eyes dim with tears when they thought that they would never see that loving face, or hear those thrilling tones again. Then came the final leave-taking, in which they gave free rein to their sorrow. Not until the very last moment would they leave him, accompanying him to the ship, and watching till the vessel grew faint and indistinct in the distance. Then, and not till then, with heavy hearts did they face the long tramp home.

CHAPTER XXIII

DANGER THICKENS

TWO days after the leave-taking at the harbour-side the nine voyagers reached Patara. This was the vessel's final port of call, before returning with a fresh cargo westward. Here a serious delay might well have taken place, but by God's good mercy they found another ship alongside the quay, on the point of sailing for Phœnicia. They had just time to move their luggage from one vessel to the other before the anchor was weighed and the sails hoisted. A good wind gave them a prosperous journey across the open sea to Tyre, where the ship remained a week to unload her merchandise before proceeding to the more southerly port of Ptolemais.

Paul's first step at Tyre was to search out the Christians of the place, for there was hardly a town now where disciples were not to be found. Tyre was of course a Gentile city, and they would have been intensely interested in the wonderful story of

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the spread of the Kingdom among the Gentiles of the west.

Here he received the first warning from outside of the hidden danger lurking in Jerusalem. But Paul had no doubt asked God for guidance and direction, and had got his Master's orders. These warnings were not sent to prevent his journey, nor to frighten him into a cowardly retreat. They came to prepare him for what he would have to face.

There were many reasons why Paul desired urgently to visit Jerusalem. He had in the first place a long report to make to the heads of the Church there. If his plan of visiting Rome and the regions beyond ever came to anything, he would have to leave in other hands the over-seeing and guidance of the Churches he had founded. Much more so if imprisonment were to be his portion, for then his own travelling days would be over. For all these possibilities he wished to prepare. These and other reasons made Paul eager to reach Jerusalem, no matter what befell; and he rejoiced when the ship was once more ready to put to sea. At Ptolemais they left the vessel for good, as it would take them no nearer their goal. Thanks to favouring winds and weather they were still several days to the good, and Paul did not wish to reach Jerusalem long before Whit-Sunday. One day was spent at this port with the Christians of the

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place, then the little party set out by road for Cæsarea, where Philip the Deacon lived with his four unmarried daughters. Ever since the baptizing of the Ethiopian treasurer Philip had made this town his home, and no doubt his preaching had resulted in a great spread of the Gospel in that place and neighbourhood. Paul at any rate found plenty to occupy him "many days" (Acts xxi. 10). The travellers were eagerly welcomed to the house of the Evangelist with more than the usual Eastern readiness of hospitality. Paul must have sampled strange and divers lodgings during his missionary travels; but here, as in Lydia's house, everything that could make him comfortable would have been at his disposal.

Philip's four daughters possessed the gift of prophecy, and most likely helped their father in his work, especially among the women and children. Whether they were prompted to warn their guests of dangers ahead we do not know, but in any case one more warning was to reach him. The prophet Agabus, who had (Acts xi. 28) foretold the great famine in the reign of the Emperor Claudius, arrived at Cæsarea from Judæa. With the Eastern's love of symbolic action, he approached Paul, and unfastening the Apostle's long girdle proceeded to tie his own hands and feet with it. The action was quite clear and the meaning unmistakable without the words that accompanied it.

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“Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”

With tears and entreaties the whole company crowded round Paul, beseeching him to give up his project of visiting Jerusalem. But one and all mistook the real meaning of the message. The foretelling of the famine by Agabus at an earlier period was to prepare the Christian Church to take measures to meet the scarcity and want when it came. The famine was decreed by God, and no prayers would avert it, but practical common sense could carry them through it. So now. Paul's imprisonment was God's will, and no flight would have saved him in the end. But God would not let Paul go into danger unprepared. He knew that Paul was man enough to go forward unafraid, even with the certainty of disaster hanging over him, and so He honoured Paul with the burden of foreknowledge. Like Jesus, his Lord and Master, the Apostle was to “set his face towards Jerusalem” knowing full well the danger he was running into. His friends also were to be warned and to be ready, not to hinder and weaken him by tears and lamentations, but to stand by him as true workers and fellow-labourers.

“What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart, for I am ready not to be bound only, but also

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to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts xxi. 13).

With this appeal Paul silenced the loving ex-postulations of his friends. "The will of the Lord be done," they said, not in the resignation of despair, but with renewed faith in God's guidance and care.

When the day came for Paul and his companions to leave Cæsarea, several of the Christians of the town went with them. Their baggage was heavy with the coin collected for the poor, and an extra hand or two would be a help. They had also another object. Mnason, a disciple from earliest times, was returning to his house in Jerusalem, where they knew Paul would procure ready and kind hospitality. Their task was to find the old man, and persuade him to join the party.

On arrival in Jerusalem, Paul received a ready welcome from the Church, but he was not deceived into believing it an universal expression of goodwill. He had his own loyal friends in all the towns he had ever visited ; but he did not forget that it was Christians from Judæa who had stirred up opposition against his authority at Corinth ; nor how the same party had undermined the faith of the Galatian Church. This party still wished to insist on the Gentiles accepting the Jewish religion as well as becoming Christians, the necessity of circumcision being their principal argument. This insistence was in face of the fact that the General

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Council at Jerusalem years before had decreed circumcision unnecessary for the Gentile converts. And so, although things looked smooth and smiling outwardly, Paul was not for one moment off his guard.

The very next day after his arrival the first hint of trouble came. A great meeting had been called together by James the Less, Bishop of Jerusalem. The business of presenting the alms was first attended to, and then Paul began his report. Four years of missionary work had to be described ; the special difficulties encountered at each centre mentioned, and the different characteristics of the Gentile Churches pointed out. In this speech Paul could not well help mentioning the very great hindrance that the Jewish Christians had placed in his way ; but that he did so very lovingly, very wisely, we may be sure. His one aim was to bind together the opposing parties, not to make the split wider. It was all-important that there should be one Church, united by one worship. In unimportant details Paul was perfectly willing to give in. He frequently declared in his Epistles that he was ready himself to be "all things to all men, so that he might by all means save some" (1 Cor. ix. 22). The Kingdom of God, he told the Romans, does not consist in what you eat or what you drink, neither in fasting or not fasting. No, nor in the lighting of candles or wearing of vest-

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ments. A thousand times no. The Kingdom of God "is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xiv. 17).

Paul's mind was full of this subject. The Epistle to the Romans had only just been dispatched, and in his speech that day before the elders he would certainly have used the same line of argument.

When he had finished, the gathering could not but praise God for the wonderful spread of the Kingdom. Then they touched on the hostile feeling roused against him by the Jewish party.

"You see, brother," they urged, "we rejoice with you over your Gentile converts, but you must not forget the many thousands of Jews who are followers of Christ. These all hold strictly to the law of Moses, and are angry with you because they have heard rumours that you teach the Jews scattered among the Gentiles in the places you have visited, that they ought not to circumcise their children, and that they need not keep the customs and law of Moses. Jerusalem is full of devout Jews, both Christian and non-Christian, and these are sure to hear of your arrival and create a disturbance. This is our advice. Prove openly to these men that you still pay respect to the Mosaic law. Four of our Christian Jews are just finishing the time of a Nazarite vow. These men are poor, and will find it difficult to provide the money for the necessary sacrifices (Num. vi. 14, 15). Conduct

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them yourself to the Temple and pay their expenses. If you do this, all men will see that whatever you teach the Gentiles, you yourself keep the law. As for the Gentile disciples, it is perfectly true that both by our Council and letters we have decided that they need keep none of these customs, except in the matter of eating blood, or meats offered to idols, or animals killed by strangling."

Paul accepted the suggestion readily, glad of any chance of drawing the two Christian parties close again. How he obtained the money to pay for the two lambs and ram to be sacrificed for each of the four men, we do not know. Since his father had cast him off, he had had to earn his own living, or accept aid from others. Perhaps his friends contributed the necessary money, or the proposers of the scheme; for the very next day Paul purified himself with the four, and took them into the Temple to give the priests public notice that the days of the vow were over, and to wait there till the sacrifices were offered.

But alas for the plan that promised so well! No doubt this open observance of the Mosaic law *did* convince all the sincere though narrow-minded Jewish Christians; but nothing will convince stubborn malice and blind hostility. Thus the enemies of Paul found even in his visit to the Temple a weapon to turn against him. They had ever been past masters in the art of twisting the truth. At

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the trials of Jesus and Stephen, words spoken by each, contorted out of their original meaning, formed the chief accusation against them. They tried the same plan now.

This time the ringleaders were Jews from Asia, who had come up to Jerusalem for the Feast. They had seen Paul walking about the town with his Ephesian friend Trophimus, and either believed, or made out, that Paul had taken this Gentile into the inner courts of the Temple, where only Jews were allowed to go. Any rumour of the profaning of their Temple was enough to rouse the Jews to fury, and they hardly needed the added accusation that Paul spoke everywhere against their national worship and law to goad them to action.

Paul was still in the Temple when the mob swept in on him. Seized and buffeted and dragged out of the Temple into the streets, Paul might well have thought his last hour had come. Murder was written clearly on the faces around him, but the very denseness of the crowd kept him for the time from receiving a mortal injury. Soon they would realize this fact themselves, and make space for deadlier blows. Rescue, however, was close at hand. It did not come from the Temple authorities. *They* had bidden the Levites shut the great gates behind the mob and its victim, glad to avoid bloodshed in that holy place. No, rescue came from quite a different quarter.

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The Roman troops stationed on the hill overlooking the open Temple courts were always on the alert to check any such disturbance at its start. Especially watchful were they during the three Jewish Feasts, when the religious fervour of the Jews was at its height, and only needed a spark to set it on fire. The sentries had been quick to notice the unusual commotion and uproar, and Lysias, the chief captain, was warned at once. He did not lose a moment. With a company of troops behind him, he ran down the steep hill into the street. The sudden appearance of the Roman soldiers stopped the mob from beating Paul to death, and he was promptly dragged from their hands.

Lysias, naturally imagining that his prisoner had been guilty of some terrible crime, had him securely chained. But when he tried to find out who he was and what he had done, the tumult arose once more. Yells of rage, accusations, explanations, shouts of "Away with him," rose in a perfect babel of sound. Lysias speedily saw that he would get no sense out of the crowd, and that the only way to quiet the disturbance was to remove the prisoner. A word of command to the soldiers, and they closed round Paul, moving off in a compact body towards the castle. The mob, baulked of their prey, rushed after them, and so great was the pressure that Paul was literally lifted off his feet and carried up the

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flight of stairs into safety. As he was about to pass into the castle, he turned to the chief captain and asked him in Greek :

“ May I speak to you ? ”

Lysias regarded Paul with astonishment.

“ Can you indeed speak Greek ? Then you cannot be the Egyptian outlaw whose band of brigands have been murdering and plundering all who pass by his wilderness stronghold. Them we have been able to destroy and scatter, but the Egyptian has so far escaped us.”

“ On the contrary,” Paul answered, “ I am a Jew from Tarsus, citizen of no mean city, and I beg you to give me leave to speak to the people below.”

It was a request that Lysias might well have refused, but he seems all through his dealing with Paul to have been struck by the Apostle's bearing and manner. That after such treatment the little man should have been so calm and collected, gained his admiration.

So while the soldiers guarded the stairs, Paul, standing on the topmost step, raised his hand for silence. His very dauntlessness gained him a hearing. He spoke in the Hebrew language, dear to them all, the language of the Temple and the Bible. This speech was unlike any of his others, for the men below were not in a mood to listen to a sermon. They needed to be told the simple facts of Paul's

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life, so as to see that the accusations brought against him were palpably untrue.

So Paul gave a brief summary of his career, relating his early training, and the zeal with which he had persecuted the Christians; then his conversion on the way to Damascus, his recovery of sight at the hands of Ananias, and his divine commission to preach Jesus to all the world. He explained how his sudden change from persecutor to disciple prevented his being listened to by the Jews of Jerusalem, and how God's answer to his grief and disappointment had been: "Do not grieve. Leave Jerusalem, for I have chosen you to preach far away among the Gentiles."

Up to that last hated word the crowd had listened in silence, their eyes raised to the figure on the stairs. But now common sense was drowned in religious pride. They themselves as a body had refused to accept Jesus as their Saviour, but that the Gentiles should be allowed a privilege which they despised was too much for them. They went mad with rage, flinging dirt in the air, tearing their clothes and yelling for Paul's immediate death.

Lysias, who had watched the scene with interest, could not understand this sudden renewal of fury. Even if he knew Hebrew, he would never have understood why a mission to the Gentiles should awake such ungovernable rage. No, it was clear to him that the prisoner must have been guilty of

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some terrible deed of wickedness. Well, if so, he would soon force the truth out of him by torture. Hurrying Paul within the castle gates, Lysias left orders with a centurion to see the man scourged, and to report what he might say. The soldiers were busy replacing the chains with ropes, preparatory to tying him up for punishment, when Paul spoke to the centurion.

"Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman and uncondemned?"

The officer started at the quiet question, and bidding the soldiers wait a moment, hurried to find Lysias.

"Sir, take heed what thou doest, for this man is a Roman."

Lysias returned with the centurion to the hall, where with bared back and bound limbs Paul stood waiting, the soldiers with the rods near by.

"Tell me the truth," pleaded the captain; "are you indeed a Roman?"

"Yea," came the calm answer.

"With a great sum obtained I this freedom," said the astonished Lysias.

"But I was free born," said Paul.

In some fear of the trouble he might have got himself into, Lysias commanded Paul to be unbound. Thus once again the fact of his Roman citizenship had saved Paul, and won him the respect and consideration of Roman officials.

CHAPTER XXIV

BONDS AND AFFLICTIONS

THE day after Paul's rescue from the mob, Lysias summoned a meeting of the Jewish Sanhedrin, hoping by this means to find out the truth about his prisoner. At the time appointed for the hearing of the case, Paul was conducted by a sufficient force of soldiers down the castle hill and through the outer courts of the Temple. Once in the Council Chamber Paul looked round upon his judges. There were many faces there that he recognized. These had sat at that never-to-be-forgotten trial of Stephen, others had assisted him in his persecution of the Christians. Then they had been the faces of friends, now one and all expressed loathing, contempt, and implacable hatred. But in the countenance of the prisoner was neither loathing, hatred, nor contempt, only a calm dignity and steady courage.

Looking earnestly around, he said quietly : "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

Paul did not mean to praise himself by this

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statement as his enemies thought. All he meant was that there had never been a time when he had not wished to do right. Yes, even before he met his Saviour on the Damascus road, he honestly believed he was doing God service.

Last evening on the castle steps he had shown his hearers how all his life he had tried to follow God's guidance, and that it was a Divine commission which he held for his mission to the Gentiles. Now he repeated the same argument in another form.

But the Sanhedrin looked on him as a turncoat, a traitor to their cause, and this bold statement staggered them.

The audacity of the man was outrageous.

"Smite that man on the mouth," commanded the High Priest, Ananias. A blow was probably speedily and viciously given by those standing nearer the Apostle. No doubt to the High Priest it seemed a just punishment for what he considered a blasphemous lie, but it was an illegal act of violence all the same, and as such Paul regarded it. We must remember that in all Bible narrative much is necessarily left out, and that only a very short summary of Paul's speeches is given in the Acts. For the most part, Luke's wonderful writing makes the scenes very clear to us; but this one is harder to understand. As the story is told (Acts xxiii. 3), Paul turned his short-sighted eyes on the giver of the order.

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"God shall smite thee, thou hypocrite, for you sit there to judge me by the laws of our nation, and then command me to be struck contrary to the law."

In horror the Jews standing near by asked Paul how he dared to speak evil of God's High Priest. Paul's answer has perplexed many.

"I did not know," he said simply, "that he was the High Priest, for it is commanded us not to speak evil of a ruler."

Paul's sight was bad, we know, but could he have failed in that earnest look around to notice who occupied the chief seat in the Sanhedrin; or did his quick ear not catch whose voice gave the order for the blow? Did he mean to infer that the wickedness and hypocrisy of Ananias rendered him unfit for such a holy office? Or were his words meant as an apology for his hasty rebuke? We do not know. Paul was, after all, but human, and it may well have been that his quick temper betrayed him into a retort which he would not have uttered had he stopped to think. If this were so, his second remark may have meant: "When I spoke I did not stop to consider that he was the High Priest."

Paul's words were, however, prophetic. Ananias fell by the hand of assassins at the beginning of the Jewish rebellion against Rome.

Only one other remark of Paul's is given at this

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trial before the Sanhedrin. He seems to have spoken for some time with very little effect, when he saw a chance of gaining sympathy from at least a portion of his hearers. He loudly proclaimed himself a Pharisee, and a firm believer in the Resurrection of the dead, and the hope of the life everlasting. The effect of this assertion was immediate. The Pharisees present echoed Gamaliel's argument at the first trial of the Apostles.

"We find no evil in this man ; but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God——" The rest of the sentence was drowned by an outcry from the Sadducees, and the dispute speedily grew from words to deeds. Yells and curses were hurled from one party to the other, and while some sought to protect Paul, the greater part strove to get hold of him with the purpose of dragging him out to his death. Men surged to and fro, pushing, fighting, struggling, and Paul was in danger of being literally torn in pieces when Lysias once more rescued him.

The morning trial before the Sanhedrin had failed utterly, and the chief captain knew no more than he had before what was the real cause of complaint against his prisoner. But to Paul himself one thing was quite clear. Jewish hatred would never rest till it had procured his death. Did he regret his journey to Jerusalem and wonder if, after all, those warnings had been sent to stop his

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foolhardy project? Had he put his head into the noose for this? He had failed all round. Where now were his plans of carrying the Gospel to Rome and the regions farthest west?

Paul's heart sank very low that day, but comfort was near at hand. That night he woke to behold a vision of his beloved Lord and Master.

"Be of good cheer, Paul," said the loving voice, "for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."

The longing of Paul's heart was to be granted, then, but it was to be a witness in bonds as the Jerusalem witness had been. There was also this consolation implied in the words: from God's point of view Paul's few days in Jerusalem had not been wasted. Visible results are what we look for and judge by, and when we cannot see them we allow ourselves to get discouraged. But God sees farther than man does. His eye had noted in Elijah's day each one of those seven thousand whose knee had not bowed to Baal. Perhaps this was one of the lessons Paul had to learn in his long imprisonment—just to go steadily, faithfully on witnessing for God without any of the satisfaction of seeing to any large extent the fruit of his labours.

Paul was ready now to face fearlessly whatever might befall. It was still morning when a young man climbed the castle hill and begged to be allowed to see the prisoner. His request was easily granted.

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Paul was not kept, as in Philippi, in a dark dungeon, but in a room, his safety being ensured by the presence of a soldier guard to whom he was chained night and day. As the door opened he looked up to recognize the son of that sister of his, of whom we know so tantalizingly little. Had she sent her son to Paul that morning? Were either she or her boy Christians? Did they live in Jerusalem, or had they come up for the Feast? Or was the mother by this time dead? We know the answers to none of these questions. The only thing clear is that the nephew was fond of his relative and ready to serve him.

"Uncle," he said, "there is a plot among the Jews to destroy you. More than forty of them have sworn a great oath that they will not eat or drink until they have killed you. The plan is this. To-morrow the Chief Priests and heads of the Council are going to ask Lysias to bring you down into their judgment-hall again, under the pretext that they want to ask you certain questions. The band will lie in wait, and as soon as the escort of soldiers is withdrawn from the Temple courts, these men are going to spring out and fall upon you. I have only heard of this by chance, and have come instantly to warn you."

Paul looked from his chained wrist to the impassive face of his Roman guard.

"I can take no steps, as you see, for my own

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safety," he said, "but if Lysias hears of this plot, I fancy he may do something. Roman law is not fond of brooking Jewish interference, as I have proved. I will ask the centurion yonder to take you to the chief captain."

Paul's nephew repeated the story in private to Lysias. The very simplicity of the plot showed the officer how cunningly it had been planned, and how infallibly he would have fallen into the net had this warning not reached him. He saw clearly that this prisoner would be a constant source of trouble, in a town where disturbances sprang up as quickly as mushrooms. He sent Paul's nephew therefore away, with strict injunctions not to breathe a word which might lead the Jews to suspect that he knew of their designs. Absolute secrecy was necessary, both for the informer's own safety and for the success of a counter-plot which was already forming in Lysias' mind. It was clear to him that he must get rid of Paul. At Cæsarea he would be in the Roman capital of Judæa, with a far stronger force of soldiers about him than Jerusalem possessed. Therefore to Cæsarea he should be sent that very night. Lysias probably chuckled to think of the Jews' disgust at finding their prey flown, and of how they would be forced to break their solemn vow or die of starvation.

The size of the escort that he ordered out for this midnight expedition showed that he did not

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under-estimate Jewish hate, or forget to provide against a possible ambush by the way, should any inkling of his intentions leak out. Four hundred and seventy men picked from the troops under his command got ready silently and secretly that night. They waited till the noise of the town was hushed to silence, then with Paul in their midst they set out on the long and hasty march; their swords loose in the scabbards and spears at rest. At Antipatris the foot-soldiers turned back, confident that danger was now past, while the cavalry pushed on to Cæsarea. There they delivered Paul into the charge of Felix the Governor, with the letter from Lysias explaining the reason of his action. The note concluded thus: "I can find nothing against the prisoner worthy of death or of bonds, but I am telling his accusers to bring their charge before your judgment-seat. Farewell."

Felix read the letter carefully. The fact of Paul's Roman citizenship did not escape his notice, and he asked which was his native province. On hearing that it was Cilicia, which also formed part of the Roman province of Syria, he commanded Paul to be kept safely, promising to hear his defence when his accusers had arrived from Jerusalem. Paul had fallen into bad hands, a fact of which he was probably well aware. Felix was both wicked and weak, indulging his passions of revenge and cruelty, yet anxious to avoid public complaint



PAUL SENT TO FELIX.

"Silently and secretly that night . . . with Paul in
their midst they set out."

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of his conduct by favouring the strong Jewish party. A man who perverted Roman justice by the taking of bribes was not likely to be an honest judge of a prisoner against whom popular opinion ran so high.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LONG IMPRISONMENT

FIVE days after Paul's arrival at Cæsarea his enemies reached there also. The High Priest intended to spare neither pains nor money in his endeavour to procure a sentence, and had brought with him Tertullus, a man well acquainted with Roman law, to state the case against the prisoner. Tertullus knew that with the man before him flattery would be always acceptable, and judged that criticism of a rival official would also please. He therefore began his charge by complimenting Felix on his wise rule and "worthy deeds," and severely criticized the action of Claudius Lysias in violently snatching Paul out of the hands of the Jews, when they were about to judge him—so he said—by the Jewish law. As the affair *had* been taken out of their hands, however, he set the accusation against the prisoner under three heads.

First. Paul caused disturbance wherever he travelled among the Jews of the neighbourhood.

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Second. He was a ringleader of the new religion of Jesus.

Third. He had deliberately tried to profane the Temple.

These were cleverly thought-out accusations. The whole known world was then under Roman rule, and we have seen at Ephesus, Philippi, and Thessalonica how carefully Roman officials guarded their outlying provinces against rebellion and strife, getting rid of any person likely to disturb the public peace. A genuine fermenter of trouble was a traitor to the Empire, and could this charge be proved against him, Paul's death sentence was assured.

The second charge was one of less weight with Rome, though of more importance in Jewish eyes, and the last charge affected both Roman and Jew alike, since the government of Rome protected the Jews in their Temple worship, and respected their religious practices. We have seen how Lysias withdrew the Roman guard as soon as Paul was safely within the Temple courts, and it was on this consideration for their feelings that the band of murderers had traded when they made their plot against Paul's life. Thus the threefold charge was sufficiently grave to give his enemies hope.

Paul's ready brain, however, had noted the weak points in the case against him, and in his defence he promptly pointed them out. He had

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made no disturbance in Jerusalem ; he had not disputed or preached or gathered a crowd together either in the Temple or in the streets. He had, indeed, only been in Jerusalem a very few days, having visited the city to bring alms and offerings to his nation. And so far from neglecting the law of Moses, he had been found in the Temple keeping one of the more uncommon of its ordinances in an absolutely orderly manner.

“ One thing I do allow,” he added. “ I worship the God of my fathers in the way that these men call heresy, and I have a firm hope in the resurrection of the dead. My enemies cannot prove their statements, neither do I see here among them the Asian Jews who objected first to my actions.”

Jewish spite and malice were no new things to Felix, but although he guessed Paul innocent, he could not make up his mind to settle the case then and there. He preferred to wait until he saw which side it would pay him best to take. The mention of the money which Paul had brought with him made him hope that a large bribe would be offered by the prisoner or his friends for his release. If so, it would be worth his while to offend the Jews. On the other hand, he knew he had powerful enemies working against him at Rome, and it might pay him better to gain favour with the Jews by condemning an innocent man. These self-interested motives made him postpone all

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decision with the excuse that he could do nothing further until Lysias himself came down to Cæsarea.

Paul was kept here also in military custody, chained to a soldier guard, but free to receive his friends and acquaintances, and allowed as much freedom as was consistent with his safe keeping. Doubtless strict precautions were taken against the admission of an assassin.

It is very doubtful if Lysias ever came to Cæsarea. His letter had told all that he knew of the matter, and race-hatred was getting so strong in the capital that it is not likely he could have been spared from his difficult post.

Paul had several private audiences with Felix. At one of these at least Felix's wife, Drusilla, was present. She was the sister of Herod Agrippa II: and of Berenice, and was curious to see the man about whom she must have heard many strange stories, and to hear from him about this new faith in Jesus. Paul had preached to slaves and their owners; merchants; Greek philosophers; impulsive Celts (Galatians); proud noblemen; prisoners; gaolers; seafaring men, and many others. Now he was called upon to preach Jesus to the hard-hearted and selfish Roman Governor and his beautiful but equally wicked wife.

Like John the Baptist before Herod, Paul did not mince matters. He spoke out boldly and bravely, telling his hearers how Jesus, the Son of

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God, expects righteousness and self-control from His followers, and of how hereafter men will be judged for all the deeds they have done on earth. Felix's life had been utterly selfish, utterly uncontrolled. He had always gratified every feeling of hatred or passion or desire. Paul's words frightened him, as well they might, and he trembled.

The jailor of Philippi had been frightened when the earthquake loosed the doors and chains that held his prisoners safe. He too had trembled, but there the likeness between the two men ceased. The jailor had come humbly to ask, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Felix said, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

Men still take these two paths. When conscience pricks, and they feel the uncomfortable sense that their lives are not what they might be, they either try to drown the "still small voice" of the Spirit by filling their minds at once with something else, or they say with the jailor, "Master, what must I do to be saved?"

Whether in the later interviews Paul ever again was able to influence Felix is very doubtful. Like Pharaoh he had hardened his heart, and after two years, when his enemies at Rome procured his recall from Syria to answer for his evil deeds before the Emperor, he left Paul still in military confinement.

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The injustice of it ! Two whole years chained night and day to a Roman guard, his cause untried, his life-work at a standstill, his zeal and energy pent up. It was not what Paul would have chosen. But God, who takes such infinite pains with each individual soul, chose this resting-time for His friend. It gave him greater time for prayer and thought ; repose of body and brain from the wearing strain of the missionary journeys ; and it taught him a more complete reliance on Divine care, a more child-like trust in the Everlasting Arms. Perhaps, too, it taught him a deeper humility. His presence was not indispensable to the Churches he had founded, as he may have thought it was.

Two lines of usefulness were still open. His friends were allowed to come and go, and Paul could write. Can we doubt that in those two years he kept in touch with his converts in all parts of the world by means of such trusty messengers as Timothy and Titus ?

If, as is thought, Luke wrote his Gospel during this period, we can picture the two friends living each scene of our Lord's life as Luke sorted and arranged "in order" every memory, every incident, every parable, every gracious word which fell from the Saviour's lips. Many others had tried (Luke i.) to write down an account of that perfect life, and perhaps had been daunted by the stupendous task. But with Paul beside him to encourage

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and sympathize and help Luke did not fail. His methodical mind went back to the very beginning of things, and where memory failed, there would still be found hundreds living in Galilean village or town who could recount anew the feeding of the five thousand, the raising of the widow's son, or the wonderful parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. It must have been an unspeakable delight to Paul as he watched the growth of his friend's Gospel.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE APPEAL TO ROME

FELIX was replaced by Festus, and immediately on the new Governor's arrival the Jews saw another chance of procuring Paul's death. When Festus visited Jerusalem, the Chief Priest and head men of the town begged that Paul might be brought to the capital for trial. Their original plan of murdering him at some spot along the road would then stand a good chance of success, as Festus was probably ignorant of their intense animosity, and would suspect no such plot. But they overdid their insistence on time and place, and Festus guessed that something lay behind this anxiety.

"No," he said firmly, "the man is in prison at Cæsarea, which is also my centre of administration. And as for your request, it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man to death until he have a chance of defending himself in open court against his accusers. Come to Cæsarea yourselves with your complaint, and I will see to the matter as soon as I return."

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Unlike Felix, Festus was just and business-like, and allowed no delay to occur. The day after his return to Cæsarea Paul was brought before his judgment-seat. But he was far more puzzled at the strange accusations brought against the prisoner than Felix was. He had little, if any, knowledge of Jewish law and religion, and to his mind the charges seemed petty and small. It was hard for any Roman to understand the religious fervour of the Jews. They were themselves ceasing to believe at all in their gods and goddesses, and were worshipping Power in the form of their Emperor and the huge Empire of which he was the head.

Festus saw that the Jews were intensely in earnest in their desire to procure a death-sentence, in spite of the fact that they had not been able to prove the charges they had made. He had never had such a curious case to deal with. That Paul had done nothing worthy of death (xxv. 25) he saw at once, but whether he were worthy of a milder form of punishment he could not decide. In sheer perplexity, therefore, he proposed in a modified form the plan of Paul's enemies. It would please these queer Jews, and as far as he could see would make no difference to the prisoner. So he turned to Paul.

"Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?"

THE APPEAL TO ROME

Festus had no intention of handing Paul over to the Jews for judgment, and with himself at the head of affairs, there could be no danger to the prisoner. But Paul knew better. He did not doubt Festus' honest intentions, but the Roman could not gauge the deadly animosity of the Sanhedrin as he could. There was one chance for him, a chance which would have been of no avail with unscrupulous Felix, but which might succeed with a fair judge. In a flash all the aspects of the situation presented themselves to his quick brain and he made up his mind. He would appeal to Cæsar. As a Roman citizen he had this important right.

"Against the Jews I have done no wrong, as you know very well, not one of their charges having been proved against me. But if I have sinned against Roman law, I have a right to be judged by the Emperor himself. I appeal to Cæsar."

Festus, astonished at this turn in the proceedings, consulted with his Council.

"Your claim is allowed," he said presently. "Unto Cæsar shalt thou go."

The duty of Festus was now quite plain. He had to find means for sending Paul to Rome as soon as possible, and meantime he had to keep him safe. He had also to put together a report on Paul's case. Here lay the difficulty. He had nothing definite to state, no real crime to charge against the man (Acts xxv. 26, 27).

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While things were still in this state, Herod Agrippa II. and his sister Berenice came on a diplomatic visit to the new Governor of the Province. In the course of conversation Festus told the King about his puzzling prisoner, and consulted him as to the report he would have to send with him.

"Can you help me at all? You know more about these Jews and their ways than I do."

Agrippa readily consented to see if he could unravel the tangle; being eager to hear Paul himself. He had heard about the Christian religion from the Jewish side, and knew he could form a good idea of the truth or falsehood of the charge of heresy against Paul. Besides, the man was reputed to be a most remarkable speaker, and it would be interesting to hear him.

Paul's speech before Agrippa begins by recognizing at once the King's knowledge of Jewish customs and ways, and so he takes a line of argument different from the one he had used before the Roman judge.

"I am happy to be able to speak before you this day, King Agrippa, because I know you thoroughly understand the religion and customs of the Jews. I am accused of being unfaithful to my religion, but this is not so. In the days of our forefathers God gave our nation a promise—the promise of the Messiah, whose advent they are still expecting.

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It is because I believe in the hope fulfilled and in the promised Saviour come that they accuse me of heresy. The Pharisees all believe in the final resurrection of the dead, and yet they deny that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead and now lives for ever. As for me, I know it, for I have seen Him and heard Him. I did not always believe in Jesus. At one time I too thought Him an impostor, a false Messiah, and I persecuted His followers far and wide. But while I was on my way to Damascus for that purpose, I saw a vision of Jesus, and a light brighter than that of the midday sun. He it was who gave me my commission, which is to be His witness to the Gentiles so that they may turn from darkness to light through faith in the Saviour of the world. Since that day I have implicitly obeyed the heavenly vision, and this is the reason why the Jews seek so earnestly to kill me. And as for the fact of the Crucifixion which they stumble at, did not Moses and the prophets foretell that the Messiah should both suffer and rise from the dead?"

Festus had been listening intently, and now interrupted the speech in loud astonishment. Jesus, he knew from the Roman records, had been crucified years before under the rule of Pontius Pilate, and here was the prisoner calmly talking of His resurrection, and of having seen and talked with Him since that event! The man must be crazy.

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"Paul, you are talking wildly," he exclaimed; "your constant reading and study have turned your brain."

Paul turned to the Roman magistrate. "No, most noble Festus," he said quietly, "I am not mad. I am speaking nothing but the sober truth, and what is more, the King himself knows about all these things, for they were done openly and publicly before all men. King Agrippa, I know that you believe in the prophecies of the Messiah."

But Agrippa's pride was too deeply rooted to allow Paul's persuasive argument to influence him. He turned the question aside.

"Do you fancy," he said scornfully, "that you can persuade me by one short speech to become a Christian?"

Paul looked at the hard proud face very earnestly. "I would to God, that you and all who hear me this day were Christians, like me in all things—except these chains."

King Agrippa arose instantly at this touching appeal, and the royal pair left the room with their host. Both men were convinced by now of Paul's innocence. It was clear in every word he uttered, in the honest straightforward account he gave of himself, in the fearless openness of his manner and expression.

"It is a great pity that this man has appealed to Cæsar," said Agrippa to Festus. "A fanatic he

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may be, but certainly he is no criminal. I know how easy it is to rouse the enmity of these Jews, and I wager that all their accusations against Paul are founded on malice and spite. You might have set him free at once, if it were not for this unfortunate appeal."

Yet that appeal to Cæsar was not the big mistake Agrippa thought it. It had, humanly speaking, saved Paul's life in a dangerous crisis, and was to be the greatest blessing to the Christian Church. Paul returned to prison with his soldier guard, and Festus sat down to write a most favourable report of his prisoner to the Emperor Nero, a report which probably gained Paul's freedom two years later in his first trial before Cæsar.

CHAPTER XXVII .

THE JOURNEY TO ROME

PAUL had got the wish of his heart. He was to visit Rome; and although he might be going to face torture and death, still his heart beat high. God had said He had work for His servant there, a witness for him to give, and Paul's gallant soul, which neither old age nor weak health could permanently daunt, was full of courage and hope. Luke and Aristarchus were going with him; Luke out of his unfailing devotion to Paul, and Aristarchus as a "fellow-prisoner." It is possible that the latter may have been involved in the original charge against Paul of profaning the Temple, or he may have been taken into custody at a later date.

In Rome Paul had many friends, chief among whom stood the old tent-maker and his wife. Aquila and Priscilla had already risked their lives in his defence (Rom. xvi. 3, 4), and were to be relied on. Cousins of his, too, were living in Rome, and there too resided Rufus' mother, who somewhere

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and at some time had taken Paul into her warm heart as an adopted son (Rom. xvi. 13). One cannot read the list of greetings in the last chapter of the Epistle to the Romans without wishing that one knew more of the circumstances and history of these close friendships, but Paul's reserve and reticence on all personal matters leave us in the dark. We can only picture the nearness of the intercourse with this unnamed lady which resulted in Paul's regarding her as a mother. It is clear that the Apostle who knew how to "endure hardness" as well as any man, thoroughly appreciated the homely comforts, loving ministrations and tender care that met him as fertile oases along his rough road.

It was late autumn when Paul set sail from Cæsarea. The prisoners, of whom Paul was only one, were in charge of a centurion named Julius and an escort of soldiers. Festus' last charge to Julius would have accounted for the courtesy and kindness that the Roman showed to Paul throughout the voyage, without the friendliness, respect and confidence that daily contact soon engendered. The little Jew with his weak eyesight had a marvellous gift of human magnetism.

At Sidon the ship stopped long enough for Paul to visit his Phœnician friends with Julius' permission. On leaving that port adverse winds rose to impede their progress. The season of the

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equinoctial gales was close at hand ; and this bad weather was only the prelude of worse to come.

Forced out of their direct route, they had to steer for the passage between Cyprus and the mainland so as to gain the shelter of the island. At Myra, on the shores of Asia Minor, the trading-vessel reached the end of her journey. There Julius found a corn-ship of Alexandria on its way to Italy, and hastily engaged berths for his party from the captain. The vessel was large and heavily laden with Egyptian wheat. It was also behind time, and this early breaking up of the weather alarmed her master. Unless he made haste, he would certainly not reach Italy with his precious cargo before winter, and to be forced to spend months in harbour was an expense and delay he did not wish to incur. So in the face of a threatening sky and an angry sea the ship set out. Slowly and laboriously she tacked her way westward, driven out of her course by the fierce onslaught of the north-west wind. At Fair Havens, a small port on the south coast of the Island of Crete, they were forced to take refuge. Here they waited anxiously for a change of wind, but day by day passed and their hopes were unrealized. September was drawing to a close, and the seas would soon be unfit for sailing vessels.

The early break-up of the weather made reaching Rome out of the question. All that remained

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was to choose some safe and sheltered harbour to winter in. The question was, were they to remain at Fair Havens, or should they take the chance of the next change of wind to make for the far more sheltered port of Phenice, which lay to the north-westward? Paul strongly advised the former course. His knowledge of the sea, gained in his travels and in his boyhood's home at Tarsus, warned him of the rashness of risking ship, cargo and human lives on a doubtful gain.

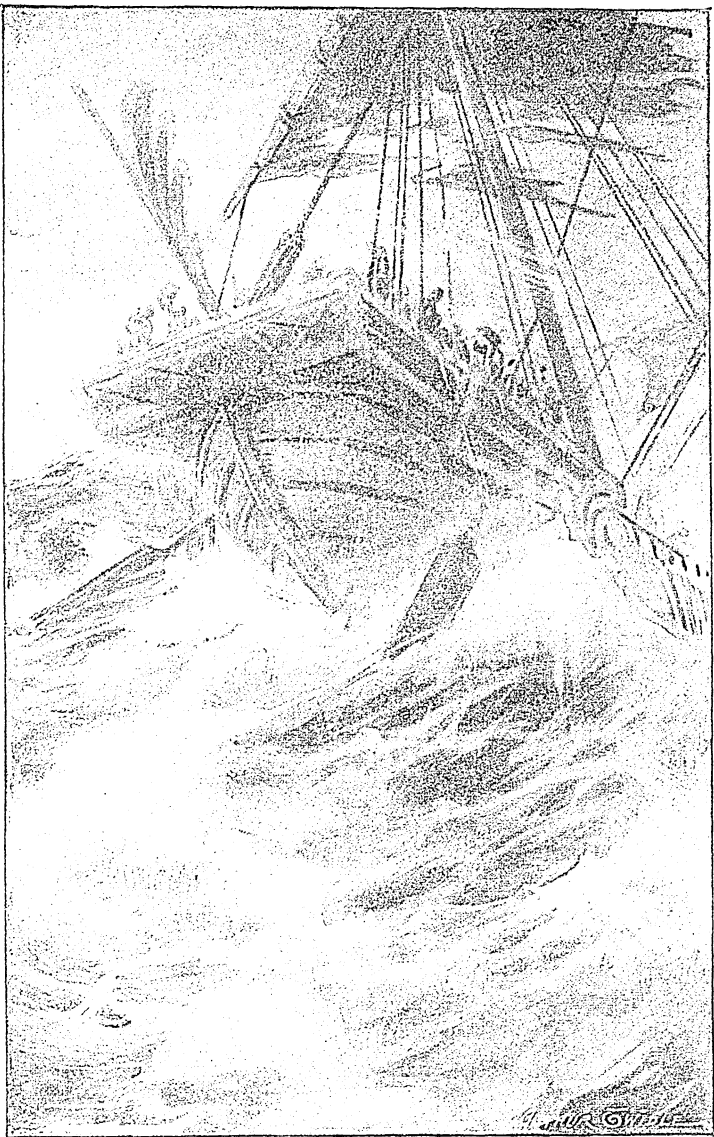
But the master-owner of the ship thought otherwise; and his opinion won the day. The centurion Julius, who had listened to Paul's advice with respect, naturally thought that in matters of seafaring the Alexandrian captain must know best. A sudden change of wind decided the matter. It veered to the south, the best direction possible for their purpose. Phenice was not far distant, the sea had gone down, and a few hours' sailing would see them snugly settled in ideal winter quarters. So keeping close to shore, they sailed slowly northward, towing the small boat usually carried on deck behind them. It would be the handier for immediate use when they reached the port.

They must have been within sight of their goal when a hurricane beat down upon them from the Cretan mountains, as sudden and violent as the storms that sometimes pounce down upon the

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smiling Sea of Galilee. No tacking was possible in such a tempest. Sails were torn like paper, and the mast strained and groaned as the ship heeled over at the first onset of the blast. There was not even time to pull up the boat. The waves rose behind them as if by magic, as they turned the ship's head and ran before the gale. Before them lay the coast of Africa with its flat and dangerous bay of Syrtis. Along that sandy shore was no port or anchorage, and even in the best of weathers it was given a wide berth on account of its treacherous shifting sands. To have been driven on to that shore would have meant certain destruction.

But in God's mercy the little island of Clauda stood in their way. Gratefully they ran under its somewhat inadequate shelter. There they lay to, and did all they could to prepare the ship to weather the gale. With great difficulty the waterlogged boat was hoisted on board. Ropes were passed under the vessel to keep the planks from starting farther apart under the strain of the tempest, and all unnecessary gear stowed away. Then having done all that brave men could do to save themselves, they held the ship's head as near to the wind as they could, and toiled at the pumps. Tossing and rolling the ship drifted slowly backwards, fighting every bit of the way; the only object of the steersman now to keep in the open



THE SHIPWRECK.

"The danger of foundering was so great that all hands that could be spared were set to lightening the ship."

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sea until the storm was over. The friendly island was soon lost to sight, and in the open Mediterranean the danger of foundering was so great that all hands that could be spared were set to lightening the ship. Personal baggage went first, and then as the leaks gained and the vessel wallowed deeper in the trough of the sea, all the spare tackling followed. But still black clouds hid both sun and stars, and as day followed day hope died in all breasts. Day and night, sailors, prisoners and soldiers toiled at the pumps, snatching a morsel of food when they could and resting hardly at all. Work and hope had for the time kept them going, but now they were utterly exhausted. Pinched with hunger, numb with cold, drenched through and through by the seas which broke over the vessel and the rain which lashed down from an inky sky, despair had taken possession of them. Paul was the first to notice their piteous condition.

"Sirs," he said, "you see that my former advice to you was sound; yet do not despair. Last night God's angel stood beside me and gave me this message: 'Fear not, Paul, you will yet reach Rome and appear before Cæsar, and God has also given you the lives of all your shipmates.' The ship indeed is doomed, and we shall be cast upon some island; but you can take heart, for God's word is certain and sure."

Did the calm serenity of Paul's face and the

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cheerful assurance of his words pierce the gloom that enwrapped them? Who can doubt it? The men whom he addressed were brave men too, but they were brave heathens. They knew not God. And there are crises in life where human bravery needs divine support. Without God much may be possible, but "with God all things are possible."

They certainly needed all the hope that they could get, for the worst was yet to come. The storm still continued unabated, the sky was still overcast. They had no idea where they were. And then on the fourteenth day since they left Fair Havens the sailors distinguished the sound they had all along been dreading to hear—the faint, sullen roar of breakers hurling themselves against the shore.

It was midnight, densely dark. Their eyes tried to pierce the gloom as the sound grew louder and more distinct, but to no avail. They heaved the lead-line overboard to test the depth of the water. The first sounding gave twenty fathoms, and the second, taken shortly after, only fifteen. They were terribly close to land. In utter desperation they cast four anchors out of the stern and longed for the day to break. With daylight they would know where they were, and be able to reckon up the chances that remained.

But that time of patient waiting for the light

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that took so long to come was too much for the courage of the sailors. Paul, moving about with words of comfort and cheer for all who would listen, came upon a group of them in the bows. There had been some talk of letting an anchor down, but it was not an anchor that these men were busy with. They were trying to lower the one boat into the sea, with the obvious intention of escaping themselves, and leaving the rest to their fate. There was not a moment to be lost. With these men gone, all further navigation of the ship would be impossible. Paul hurried to his friend Julius.

"Do you know what is happening? The sailors are deserting. We cannot possibly escape if they leave the ship."

Julius jumped to his feet. A quick command to his soldiers, an orderly rush forward, a speedy use of sword or knife, and the boat was drifting empty at the mercy of the tide. The sailors, ashamed and cowed, scattered in groups about the deck, while the rain continued to pour down, and the bitter cold chilled them all to the bone. So the hours passed, till at last faintly and slowly the day began to dawn. The light fell on haggard faces, worn with anxiety and starvation. Every one was on deck, since nobody knew how long the anchors would hold, or when they might not have to face death. Paul's heart was wrung for them. Groping his way below he fetched food, begging

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them to follow his example and make a hearty meal.

"Not a hair from the head of any of you shall fall," he assured them.

Fortified by food, they were ready for fresh exertion. The long-treasured sacks of wheat which they had tried so hard to save were pitched into the sea ; and as the light strengthened the two hundred and seventy-six men took stock of their position. The shore, upon which the rollers still broke tumultuously, was unknown to one and all. But one thing they noticed which gave them a ray of hope. Breaking the line of rock and cliff was a small creek with a sandy beach. Perhaps it might be possible to steer the ship into this bay. The captain gave rapid orders. The creak of the pumps, which all through that fortnight of horror must have formed an incessant accompaniment to the whistle of the wind, the splash of the waves and the hiss of the rain, ceased. The rudder was unlashed, a light sail was hoisted to the mast, the anchors were released, and with their hearts in their mouths they prepared to attempt the beaching of the vessel. But their ignorance of the coast-line, and the strong current, frustrated their design. While yet some distance from shore they struck a low hidden reef of rock. Here the bows of the ship stuck fast, while the stern was exposed to the fury

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of the waves. No ship could stand such treatment. The strained timbers parted and the vessel began to break up.

At this juncture a hasty discussion took place in the bows. The soldiers, whose Roman training and discipline had stood them in such good stead, came to Julius.

"Sir," they said, "we cannot any longer be held responsible for our prisoners, seeing no man can swim chained to another. Would it not be better to kill them all, lest they swim to land and escape?"

It was an idea quite in keeping with the spirit of the times. But Julius forbade such a proceeding. For his friend Paul's sake he was willing to take the risk of any unpleasant consequence, and would take the responsibility off the shoulders of his subordinates.

And it was Julius, not the Alexandrian master-owner, who gave the final orders for safety.

The ship would soon be broken to fragments and delay was useless. All who could swim slipped boldly into the water and struck out for land. The others improvised rafts of whatever lay to hand, and with a prayer to the gods they worshipped, launched themselves also in that welter of waves. Paul and Luke, we can take it, were among the swimmers. Both men had spent so much of their lives on the coast, that it would have been strange

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indeed had they not learnt to swim. Bruised, bleeding and exhausted, one and all reached the shore alive. The first arrivals no doubt helped to drag in the late-comers, or formed a human chain to rescue some poor wretch on a raft who seemed past helping himself.

Then came the roll-call on the beach, and the glad discovery that Paul's God had most royally kept His word.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ROME AT LAST

PAUL and his shipmates had landed indeed, but in what a plight! Without money, food or clothes, except the soaked garments they stood up in, they were utterly dependent on the mercy of the islanders.

But here they fell into good hands. The inhabitants of Malta were of Phœnician descent; men who from far-off times had been bold sailors, and had navigated their trading-vessels in distant and unknown seas. Their sympathies were all with seafaring men in such a strait. From the shore they had noticed the maimed condition of the vessel, and had watched with interest the efforts made to save her. Indeed, from Luke's account it would seem that they had already lighted a fire before the first swimmer reached land. Their object was probably at first to mark the safest landing-place, as well as to warm any half-frozen castaways that might reach the shore. With such a sea running a few survivors were all that could

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be expected. Hence their astonishment was intense as the numbers grew and grew.

One fire was plainly inadequate to warm and dry two hundred and seventy-six soaked and benumbed men. All hands were set to collecting brushwood, Paul among the number. He had returned to one of the bonfires with a bundle of sticks, and was laying them on the blaze, when a viper which had crept into the pile of wood for shelter, feeling the heat of the flames, shot upwards into safety. It leapt at Paul's hand, and buried its teeth in his flesh. For a second it hung there, then Paul shook it off and it dropped back into the fire.

The superstitious Maltese immediately jumped to the conclusion that Paul was a criminal. The vengeance of the gods had pursued him even although he had escaped being drowned. They watched him narrowly, knowing the deadly speed with which the viper's poison acts. But as time passed and the man neither fell down dead nor looked ill, but calmly continued to dry himself, they changed their opinion and protested that he must be a god in disguise. If they had expressed their belief openly we know how vehemently Paul would have contradicted the notion, from his action at Lystra under similar circumstances. It would have been a splendid opening for preaching the one true God who can protect His servants from every evil.

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Near by the scene of the shipwreck stood the residence of the Governor of the island, Publius by name. When he heard of the disaster, he lodged the whole party in his house and outbuildings, until he could arrange for their billeting among the islanders. Open-handed hospitality, ungrudging generosity met them in cottage and villa.

What a joy it must have been to Paul to be able to repay their kindness by healing the sick of the island! Publius' old father, ill with dysentery, was his first patient, and the news of his instant cure soon spread. In the three months that elapsed before the journey could be continued Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus must have done good work preaching Jesus and healing the sick. The Maltese in their entertainment of strangers had indeed entertained angels unawares.

At last the weather improved, and the second Alexandrian wheat-ship set sail. The islanders loaded their visitors with gifts and tokens of esteem and honour, and crowded to the quay to see them off. The *Castor and Pollux* had been more fortunate than her sister vessel. She had reached Malta before the tempest, and had prudently anchored in one of her ports. Now she proceeded to Italy bearing the precious grain that was the life of Rome. But she also carried a more costly freight. She carried the little Jew, who was God's

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chosen messenger to bear the good tidings of the Saviour—the world's Bread of Life.

At Puteoli the centurion Julius left the ship with his band of prisoners. The rest of the journey was to be accomplished by land along the Appian Way, the oldest and most famous of Roman roads. At the port Paul met certain Christian brethren. These were probably traders or merchants, eagerly awaiting the arrival of expected cargoes from distant lands.

These brethren implored Paul and his friends to remain a week at Puteoli, which with Julius' permission he was enabled to do. It was the last kindness and mark of esteem that the centurion would be able to show his prisoner friend, since at Rome his duty as escort would be over. These seven days gave the Christians the opportunity of sending word to Rome of Paul's arrival, so that when the little band next moved forward along the paved stone road, Paul's heart was cheered by sight of old friends who had hurried out to meet him. And "he thanked God and took courage." We may be sure that Aquila and Priscilla were among the number who met him at Appii Forum or The Three Taverns.

And now Rome was in sight—Rome, with her guardian hills, where the palaces and villas of the nobles lay above the squalid network of filthy streets that clustered at their feet. Rome—

ROME AT LAST

mistress of the world—whose Emperor held millions of lives in his unscrupulous, selfish hands; whose wealth and power were only equalled by her corruptness and wickedness. Paul must have noticed a great deal that saddened him as he trod the Appian Way: bands of wretched slaves of all nationalities alongside their captors, bound for the galleys or for the next display in the circus, where thousands were butchered yearly to please the savage populace. Proud soldiers in spotless armour and glittering crests rode or marched along the road, yielding place to none, save some higher officer or noble. Beggars of all ages hobbled along the side of the road, or stood whining for money under the shade of tree or statue. Gladiators strode confidently by, heads held high and chests thrown out, knowing full well the morbid interest which their passage aroused. Merchants with their baggage mules; privately owned slaves, bearing burdens for their masters; water-carriers; fruit-vendors; fishermen and sailors from foreign parts; these and many others thronged that well-worn road.

At last the city gates were in sight, and Julius drew his band of prisoners into orderly array. Paul's friends fell on one side, and with the escort of soldiers to left and right they passed through the gateway and along the narrow streets. On the Palatine Hill stood the Emperor's palace, and

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near by lay the imperial barracks. Here it is supposed that Julius handed his charge over to Burrhus, then chief prefect and honoured adviser of Nero. Burrhus was an honest upright soldier, and evidently listened with interest and sympathy to Julius' recommendation of Paul. It obtained for him the special favour of a private room or rooms, probably near the barracks, where he could see his friends whenever he liked. Freedom on parole, or ticket of leave seems to have been rarely granted, since, as in Cæsarea, he was still chained day and night to a soldier guard. These men had special hours of duty; so that during the two years of his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul must have made the acquaintance of a great number of Roman soldiers. It may have been his influence on these men that enabled Christianity to penetrate into the wickedest of all palaces, the court of the monster Nero;

On the third day after his arrival in Rome, Paul's room was full of visitors. He had sent messages to the heads of the Jewish colony asking them to come and see him. He wanted to make his position clear to them from the start. He knew that his appeal to Cæsar might be put down by his enemies to a desire on his part to bring the Jews into trouble with Rome, an idea which if once believed would completely prejudice the Jews of Rome against the Gospel of Christ. He

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therefore carefully explained the facts which had led up to his appeal and the necessity for it ; and told them that his imprisonment was not because of any crime he had committed, since the Roman Governor had wished to let him go free, but solely because of his faith in the Messiah, the " Hope of Israel."

" We know nothing at all about the matter," his hearers protested. " No letters from Judæa have reached us about you, nor have we heard reports from traveller or merchant. But we would like very much to hear your views concerning the Messiah, for everywhere we hear this new sect of Christians spoken against."

Paul was only too willing. " Which day will suit you best ? " he asked, " since all days are the same to me."

On the day chosen Paul put forward all his powers of argument and reasoning. It was harder, far harder, to prove that the Messiah had come and gone, unrecognized, jeered at, tortured, killed by the very nation who were eagerly expecting Him, than to preach Jesus to the Gentiles. It is never easy for any of us to confess ourselves in the wrong, and the Jews were the proudest nation under the sun. But Paul had the Old Testament prophecies to back up his words, and he made good use of them. From morning till evening he explained and illustrated, tracing Jesus from His foretold

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birth at Bethlehem to His foretold death on the Cross, yes, and to the foretold Resurrection and Ascension. The Old Testament gave it all, if they would only believe it.

The result of that long day's preaching was that there was a division among the Jews. The generous and open-minded, tracing Paul's references from their own rolls of the Scriptures, were convinced. The others, hardened in prejudice, rejected the evidence with disdain. What! A whole nation wrong! Impossible! The Jews were all expecting Messiah! How could all their learned Rabbis make this great mistake? No, when Messiah came it would be in some unmistakable manner, so that all might see and know. They doubtless put these arguments forward.

"Not so," said Paul sadly, "even this blindness of heart was foretold. Isaiah warned you that the people should hear Messiah's voice and not understand His message; should see Messiah's form, yet not recognize Him. But if the Jews, God's own people, reject, the Gentiles will listen and accept."

As far as we know, this was the Apostle's last great effort to win the Jews. The Acts of the Apostles ends with these words: "Paul abode two whole years in his own hired house, preaching and teaching, no man forbidding him."

Two whole years of respite from immediate

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danger, free to receive all visitors ; a busy time of writing, both for himself and Luke, whose book of Acts must most certainly have been begun at this time. What prevented Luke from finishing the account of his friend's life we shall never know. We are not entirely dependent on Luke, however, for our knowledge of what happened to Paul. His own letters give us details, tantalizingly vague it is true, since Paul was never one to mention himself, but pieced together we can still picture something very near the real facts.

CHAPTER XXIX

VISITORS, LETTERS AND FRIENDS

WE can only guess at the reasons which led to the two years' postponement of Paul's trial. Just at that time the Jews were enjoying a period of quiet prosperity. Nero, still under the restraining influence of Burrhus, had not yet thrown off all decency in his public dealing and actions. His private life was one round of unbridled pleasure, passion and vice. He detested the performance of dull duties, and cared nothing for the heartache and hope deferred of the hapless prisoners awaiting his will. Another reason for delay may have been the slowness of Paul's enemies in collecting evidence against him, whether real or invented. They would certainly not have minded keeping Paul in prison while they did so, being far from sure of obtaining his condemnation. Meantime he was safely out of the way.

Paul had moved from his first temporary

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lodging, and was now in his own hired house, a change for the better made possible by the generosity of his Philippian friends. Epaphroditus was the bearer of this gift—a sum so large that Paul had no further money difficulties during his stay in Rome.

“I am full, I abound,” he writes in his letter to Philippi, “thanks to the things you sent me by Epaphroditus.”

What a joy it must have been to Paul to hear once more of his Philippian friends, members of that Church which was the truest, the most loyal to his teaching and to Christ!

“I thank my God every time I think of you,” he writes to them (Phil. i. 3).

But loyal though they were, there was one “lack of service” (Phil. ii. 30) which Paul had noticed and wondered at. Philippi had supplied him with no fellow-worker as had the other Churches he had founded. Lystra and Derbe, Corinth, Ephesus, Colossæ, Thessalonica, and even little Berea had responded nobly to the Gospel call for missionaries, men who had willingly undertaken to spread the knowledge of the Saviour, and who were now working under Paul’s direction. Philippi alone had been unrepresented, and now Epaphroditus had come of his own free will to place himself at Paul’s disposal. Bravely and wholeheartedly he set himself to minister to the

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Apostle. With a total disregard of his own health and safety he laboured for Christ in Rome, preaching chiefly in the crowded and insanitary streets where lived the poorest and most wretched of the population ; carrying the good news to those who could not or would not visit the prisoner in chains. Before many months had passed, however, severe illness put a stop to his activity, and eventually robbed Paul of this "companion in labour." For weeks Epaphroditus lay between life and death, and although he was eventually restored to health, home-sickness and depression weighed on his spirits to such an extent that Paul made up his mind to send him back to Philippi.

"Do not think he has failed," Paul writes in the letter he sent by his friend. "It was his zeal for Christ that brought about this illness. Therefore receive him with gladness and honour. Very soon I hope to send my son Timothy to you, and later I will come myself, if, as I believe, I am set free in the impending trial in answer to your prayers" (Phil. ii. 19-30).

So Epaphroditus returned home, leaving Paul the poorer for his loss. Epaphras was in prison for the faith, but Timothy and Luke were Paul's constant companions, and Mark, Tychicus, Trophimus and Titus came and went with messages to the Churches.

It was during these two years that Paul made

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the acquaintance of Onesimus, the runaway slave of a Colossian convert of his. Philemon, the slave-owner, had become a Christian during Paul's three years' residence in Ephesus, when "all Asia heard the word of the Lord." He and his wife Apphia were personal friends of the Apostle. How Onesimus reached Rome we do not know. It was not easy for a slave to escape from servitude. Lack of money and the peculiar dress worn both made it difficult. The ordinary slave, far from his own birthplace, torn away from parents, relations and friends, cut off from all his old associations by language, race and customs, soon sank into sullen indifference.

But Onesimus was not an ordinary character. He was active, resourceful and unscrupulous. I think we may be certain (indeed Paul hints at the fact later) that he stole what he needed in the way of clothes and money, after which the getting to Rome was merely a matter of time and assurance. There he would have found plenty of means of making a living, since he evidently was not particular as to how it was gained. What induced him to visit Paul we do not know. Some chance acquaintance or comrade may have persuaded him to accompany them, or he may have remembered Paul's last visit to his master. Whatever was the motive, Onesimus came and fell at once under the spell of Paul's personality. The young

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headstrong slave and the old preacher had a great deal in common; for the attraction was mutual. As day by day Onesimus learnt more of Jesus and His love, gratitude and wonder filled his heart. Why, Jesus had willingly died the slave's death to save him—Onesimus. In His sight slave and free-man were both equal. What an amazing difference from the world as Onesimus knew it! He was won completely by those two facts. Paul began to find him useful. Half the population of Rome were slaves, and Onesimus could reach them when others failed.

Before long, however, Paul found out the details of the lad's flight from Colossæ, and his soul was torn in two. His strict sense of fairness and straight dealing showed him the course he would have to urge on Onesimus—a return to the master he had wronged with a full confession. And because he loved the lad and was loath to part with him, it must have given Paul's heart a wrench when he first pointed out to Onesimus the path to full pardon and peace.

Put yourself in Onesimus' place. How would you have felt about that return, after you had won your freedom and had tasted the sweetness of it, after you had been treated as a comrade and a man, instead of a beast? True, Philemon and Apphia were just and kindly, but there was the overseer to face, and there were awful tales of the

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punishment meted out to runaway slaves. I think you and I would have hesitated.

But the slave-boy's faith stood the test grandly. For the Lord's sake he was ready even to return to slavery.

Paul did his very best to soften the hardness of that return. He wrote a touching letter of appeal to Philemon.

"For the sake of the love which you bear me, I beseech you be good to my son Onesimus, whom I am sending back to you. I would gladly have kept him with me, for I have found him very useful in spreading the Gospel; but I could not do that without your consent. If he has wronged you in anything, allow me, Paul, to repay it you. And I beseech you receive him as you would myself, not as a slave but as a beloved brother. I will not remind you of what you owe me, for I feel sure you will do more than I suggest or ask. I think you may get a room ready for me, for I trust soon to be free to pay you a visit."

How one longs to know the result of that thoughtful, loving letter, and of what became of Onesimus! Did Philemon free him as Paul suggested? We do not know. Perhaps the slave-boy was in after years the Bishop Onesimus of Berea. If so, he had indeed earned his name, for Onesimus means "profitable" (Philemon 11).

Paul's letter was written as soon as the return

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had been decided on, but Onesimus did not start at once. Paul intended to send Tychicus also to Colossæ with two letters, the Epistle to the Colossians and the mysterious epistle to the Laodiceans (Col. iv. 16) about which there has been so much discussion. Perhaps these letters were not quite ready, or Tychicus could not be spared at once. The time of waiting must have been trying for poor Onesimus, since disagreeable duties have a trick of looking blacker if put off.

Now for a minute let us discuss the question of the lost Epistle. We know that Tychicus also carried the Epistle to the Ephesians with him, an Epistle not mentioned under that title in Col. iv. 16. Now, one thing strikes one as odd about the Epistle to the Ephesians. It is written as if to an almost unknown Church, and contains no greetings to private Ephesian citizens, a strange omission considering Paul's long residence there. Even Paul's last short letter to Timothy, then settled as Bishop in Ephesus, does not lack either personal greetings or allusions to the events that had happened there ; and the fact makes one wonder if the Epistle to the Ephesians was not really addressed primarily to Laodicea. Be that as it may, it is the last Epistle written by Paul to a Church, and one of the most beautiful. We can picture him dictating the last chapter to Timothy or Luke, his eyes on the rigid figure of his Roman



PAUL DICTATING THE LAST EPISTLE TO
THE EPHESIANS.

"His eyes on the rigid figure of his Roman guard . . . giving
that wonderful description of the armour of God."

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guard ; and giving to the Christians of Asia (and incidentally to the Christians of all time) that wonderful description of the armour of God.

Thus Paul's two years of close captivity turned out, as he acknowledged with grateful surprise, for the furtherance of the Gospel. Had he been free to travel far and wide, he might indeed have planted fresh Churches, but the Church at large would most certainly have been the poorer without those last three Epistles.

And they were happy years for Paul. Those letters of his prove it.

“ Rejoice in the Lord ; again I say, Rejoice.”

His mind was at rest from personal cares, and he was evidently hopeful about the result of his trial. His health, too, was rapidly improving with the absence of hardships and the exposure and fatigue of travel. He had his best friends near him, and the news from the Churches was on the whole good and reassuring. They were good days in every sense.

CHAPTER XXX

PAUL'S TWO TRIALS AND WHAT LAY BETWEEN

PAUL'S first trial took place before Nero in A.D. 63; and what he had foreseen took place. The letter of Festus, the favourable reports of Lysias, Agrippa and Julius more than counterbalanced any evidence that the malice and cunning of his foes had been able to collect. He was set free. And this is not mere guess-work, for all the early Fathers affirm the same fact, some of whom must have had certain witness from persons who were present at the trial.

Now, what did Paul do with his freedom?

We have only slight hints from his own letters to Timothy and Titus, and the tradition of the early Church to guide us. Luke seems either to have lacked time for further writing, or if he still continued to make notes of his friend's life, the record has been lost.

I think we may be quite certain of Paul's first

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movements, especially after his messages to Philemon at Colossæ and to the Philippians. Before his acquittal he had made up his mind what he would do if set free, and we may be sure he kept to his plan. The guest-room, so carefully prepared for him by the kindly hands of Apphia, was without doubt occupied, and the Philippians were granted the joy of beholding their dear master's face once more. There is a report that during these five years Paul visited Spain. We know he had intended doing so years ago, when he wrote to the unknown Roman Church (Rom. xv. 24), and Paul was very tenacious of purpose. I think it is very likely that he succeeded, and that his absence so far away from the reach of his enemies accounted for his safety during that time. For only a year after his acquittal things in Rome altered amazingly. The great fire of Rome took place. Nobody knew for certain how it originated. There were people who said that Nero himself set the town on fire in a drunken fit of madness, to gratify his crazy longing for a new excitement. It may have been started by some accident or carelessness as did the Great Fire of London. The two conflagrations were very similar. Both wrought untold destruction. Both roused the homeless populace to despair and fury. Both were put down as the work of strangers of a differing faith. In Rome it was the Christians who had

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to bear the blame. Nero, indeed, was glad of any scapegoat. The Christians were nothing to him; but until the houses could be rebuilt the discontent of the people would be a real menace. Very well! He would give them something else to think of—an amusement dear to their cruel hearts.

Such were the grounds on which the fiercest persecution of the Christians now started. They were thrown to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre; beaten to death; covered with pitch and burnt at stakes to illuminate the palace gardens; sewn in sacks to be gored and tossed by wild bulls in the arena. No devil's device was too horrible. All who could fled. Aquila and Priscilla returned to Ephesus. Those who were too poor to do so hid themselves in the underground passages of the catacombs. Even those Christians who occupied posts at court, or lived in palaces, must have gone about their daily duties in fear and trembling. Paul, wherever he was, must have heard terrible tales of hair-breadth escapes, and of hideous deaths faced by men and women, yes, and little children, whom he had known and loved in that great city.

And Paul, with his clear foresight, must have seen that the time of his own earthly pilgrimage was drawing very near its end. How could he, the most prominent leader of Christianity, hope

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to escape when the rank and file were dying by hundreds? What better chance could his foes have of getting rid of him? Was it likely that they would fail to seize it?

So, knowing that his days were numbered, he turned his thoughts to preparing the Churches he had founded to do without him. There were two places still without any definite head. And in looking round for suitable men, whose loyalty and wisdom could be relied on, he fixed instantly on Timothy and Titus. Young men truly to appoint as heads over the brethren, but both well proved by years of hardships and well grounded in the faith. Both fearless in danger; both zealous and eager missionaries. Titus had acquitted himself splendidly in the difficult task of enforcing Paul's rebuke on the Corinthian Church, showing a wisdom and a tact beyond his age. Yes, those were the two for Ephesus and Crete, not easy posts either of them.

With characteristic self-sacrifice Paul resolved to part with his son Timothy. He appointed him as Bishop of Ephesus, possibly taking him there in person. He had to use every persuasion he could think of to induce Timothy to remain at his post, when he himself left for Macedonia. Timothy wept openly (1 Tim. i. 3; 2 Tim. i. 4), and I expect Paul's eyes were dim with tears, for those two were very near and dear to each other.

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Pursuing the same policy, he took Titus later on to Crete, publicly placing him at the head of that Island Church with its unattractive character (Titus i. 5, 12). Perhaps it was for that very reason that Paul chose Titus for the post. He had tackled the Corinthian evil-doers. He could be trusted to deal wisely with the deceitful and lazy islanders.

Paul did not stay long in Crete. He journeyed into Macedonia and revisited the Churches there. Wherever he went he ran grave risks. The persecution of the Christians had reached the outlying provinces of the Roman Empire, and the Churches were having a terrible time. They could only meet in secret, for spies and informers were all around. Paul's presence would have been an added danger, though I do not think *they* thought of that in their joy at seeing him. But Paul did. His visits were only in the nature of a last farewell, and to ensure his beloved Churches being left in wise hands. He stayed nowhere long, coming and going in secret, and using sea or overland routes of travel, according to which offered the least danger. The approaching winter was a matter of perplexity. The sea was practically closed at that season, and escape that way would then be impossible. Paul was over seventy years of age, an old man worn out physically by hardships, anxiety and ill-health. But if his body were weak, his spirit was still as

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strong as ever. To the last moment, the last breath, he would work for his Master. Nor would he shorten the time by any foolhardy lack of precaution. To spend the winter among his friends of Macedonia or Asia was not to be thought of. He loved them too well to give them the added peril of his presence.

Eventually he made up his mind to spend the winter at Nicopolis, a town which, so far as we know, he had never visited. About this time he wrote to Timothy and Titus letters of wise advice, warning the latter to hold himself in readiness to join him at his winter station as soon as either Artemas or Tychicus arrived in Crete to take his place (Titus iii. 12).

Thus Paul planned. I do not think he ever reached Nicopolis, though some commentators think that it was there that his enemies caught him. It may have been so. But Paul was not one to go into winter quarters before it was necessary, and it was still autumn when he wrote to Timothy from his dungeon in Rome (2 Tim. iv. 21). Certain it is that he had been along the Asian coasts very shortly before his capture, staying at Miletum, where he left Trophimus behind sick (2 Tim. iv. 20), and at Troas with his friend Carpus. It was there that some sudden need of hasty departure made him leave his precious books and rolls of writing material as well as his cloak. Did he

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leave Troas under a guard for Rome? Or was it only another of those constant flights occasioned by his enemies' watchfulness? We shall never know this side the great divide.

But one thing is quite clear. When Paul was taken prisoner he was carrying on his usual systematic work as head of the Gentile Church. He had at least five co-workers with him at the moment of his arrest, men whom he sent on messages to distant Churches, or left behind at any town where especial encouragement was needed. Erastus was at Corinth, and Trophimus was still sick at Miletum, so these two escaped the great test of fidelity which came to the five. For this capture of Paul was a far different thing from any of the other perils he had met and surmounted. The nerves of all the Christians had been tried by the horrible tales of torture and death inflicted on their fellows in Rome and the Roman provinces. They lived constantly in suspense; and fear (even hidden fear) is an ill thing to harbour. It saps courage. It undermines faith.

At another crisis in the story of Christianity we read of a greater prisoner that all His companions "forsook Him and fled." The faith of Demas failed utterly. He took flight hastily for Thessalonica, and one can only hope that Paul's words in his last letter to Timothy do not hint at a worse desertion—to a denial of faith often

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demanding of Christians as the price of their own safety. Let us hope not; and that in after years he atoned for this desertion as nobly as the Apostles did for theirs.

He was not the only one that left Paul. Crescens took refuge in Galatia, and Titus—even Titus the much-trusted and newly appointed Bishop—in Dalmatia. I do not think these fled for long. Luke and Tychicus remained at Paul's side, the latter being afterwards sent to Ephesus by the Apostle. So at last it was true that "only Luke" was with him.

Once more Paul and Luke journeyed to Rome as political prisoners, but this time no crowds of sympathizing friends came to meet them along the road, and Paul's imprisonment when he reached the great city was a very different affair. He was treated as a common malefactor (2 Tim. ii. 9), and though not entirely cut off from his friends, access to him was difficult and dangerous. Very few attempted it. Most denied all connection with so celebrated and hated a prisoner (2 Tim. i. 15).

Onesiphorus, the Ephesian, who faced the risk, paid for it with his life. Business had probably taken him to Rome. He had been a generous friend and helper of Paul during the latter's stay at Ephesus, and like so many who came in contact with the Apostle he loved him dearly, and love we know is "stronger than death." Onesiphorus

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never hesitated. He had great difficulty in finding Paul's place of confinement (2 Tim. i. 16, 17), but by dint of persistent inquiry and probably bribes he did it at last. What was more, he visited Paul frequently, bringing with him cheer and the little comforts of which a prisoner in such a place would stand so sorely in need.

We do not hear any more of Onesiphorus himself; but in his last letter to Timothy, Paul sends a kindly greeting to the household of this true friend, on whom he prays God to have mercy.

Paul had been up before the Roman court early in his imprisonment (2 Tim. iv. 16, 17), when Alexander the coppersmith had been the chief witness against him. Not a soul was there on Paul's side. Not a voice in all the crowded court was raised on his behalf. The old man conducted his own defence, as certain of his Master's presence beside him as if his bodily eyes had seen again the vision along the Damascus road. This was his one last chance of service. Caring little for safety so that his dear Lord might be glorified, he preached his last sermon on earth. Paul did not see any result, of course. No more does the preacher to-day when he pours out his heart in some burning appeal. But Paul's judges were evidently impressed by the prisoner's behaviour. The case was adjourned; and Paul, either because of this

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postponement, or by virtue of his Roman citizenship, was delivered from the threatened death by wild beasts in the amphitheatre. But this adjournment did not deceive him as to his ultimate fate. Paul was glad that the goal of his earthly race was so nearly attained. He had only one great longing, which was to see Timothy again before he died.

So he wrote, asking him to come as quickly as he could, confident that Timothy, even with the risk of death staring him in the face, would not hesitate for an instant.

And Mark was to come too—Mark the afore-time deserter. What an honour Paul does Mark by this simple request to Timothy! Here was another, then, on whose courage and obedience the Apostle felt he could rely. We have no hint, either from the Bible or from tradition, as to whether Timothy and Mark even reached Rome. They may never even have started. The news of Paul's martyrdom may have arrived with this Epistle, or it may have met them on their way.

It would be nice to think that Paul's last wish was granted, but we may be sure there was no regret, no repining when at last the old man left his dungeon and walked out along the Appian Way to the place of execution. The Master Who had met him on the road to Damascus, Who had stood by him at night with words of encouragement, was there

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beside him, whoever else was not. Paul's Roman citizenship won for him the quick mercy of the axe, and he passed joyfully to the fuller life, there to experience what no human eye has seen nor heart of man imagined—the things that God has prepared for them that love Him.

CHAPTER XXXI

TRADITION AND LEGEND

WITH Paul's death, such historical facts about the Apostles as we have been able to put together from the Bible come to an end. We have to look to the early Christian writers, to tradition and legend to supply the rest. Unluckily the latter source is often rendered untrustworthy by the reckless embroidery of a later and less scrupulous age. Yet in spite of worthless detail and absurd fable, a foundation of fact probably lies at the bottom of most of these traditions. The large band of disciples at Jerusalem dispersed; equally certain is it that they carried the good news with them wherever they went. The Apostles themselves probably worked on some organized scheme by which the Gospel should reach every Jewish trading settlement in far-distant lands.

Peter, we know, reached Babylon, and if the dedication of the first letter bearing his name indicates the scope of his missionary work, most

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of the provinces of Asia Minor had before this heard his strong and forceful preaching. He died at Rome—another victim of the awful persecution under Nero.

A very ancient tradition states that Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom on the same day, and certainly they died the same year. As Jesus had foretold and promised, Peter followed his Lord through the same valley of the shadow of death, at the last moment begging his executioners to plant his cross head downwards in the earth, because he felt himself unworthy of dying exactly like the Son of God.

His brother Andrew was also crucified in Greece at the town of Patræ.

James "the brother of the Lord," surnamed the Just, remained steadfastly at his post as head of the Church at Jerusalem, dying there by the hands of his own bigoted countrymen.

Thomas went widely afield, reaching Persia and perhaps India, where traces of very early Christian teaching have been found, no doubt the result—direct or indirect—of his work. There is also a very vague report that Bartholomew's life-work lay in the same direction.

Of the four Evangelists, a rather doubtful tradition gives Ethiopia as Matthew's scene of labour.

Mark is reported to have been the first Bishop

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of Alexandria, and to have suffered martyrdom there. A more trustworthy, because earlier, tradition declares him to have been Peter's secretary in the writing of the Gospel that bears Mark's name. It is quite likely that the older man supplied the greater part of the information, which Mark put into shape.

Whether Luke survived his friend Paul we do not know, since the traditions which point to his later death in Greece or Bithynia are both vague and contradictory.

The first century of the Christian era was drawing very near its end, and only one of the Apostolic band remained. The disciple whom Jesus loved, and whose name, coupled with Peter's, only appears once in the Acts, was by now a very old man. After the Lord's Ascension John had devoted himself to the Virgin Mary, throwing into his care of her some of the love which he felt for her Son. At her death he had remained in Jerusalem, or its neighbourhood, until the Roman soldiers of Vespasian and Titus poured into Judæa to punish once and for all Jewish rebellion. Then, and not till then, did he escape to Ephesus, and from there heard, with a heart wrung with grief, of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. But John did not sorrow as did the other Jews. His Master had warned him of what was in store, and he was able to look beyond earthly happenings—

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even the saddest and most humiliating—to the Kingdom where there shall be no more pain and anguish whether of mind or body.

In the persecution under the Emperor Domitian, a story is told that John was condemned to death, and thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil. He came forth unhurt, and was banished to the little island of Patmos, where he had that mystical vision of heavenly things which is fitly placed at the end of the Bible. At the Emperor's death he returned to Ephesus, where he ended his days. When too old to preach he used to be carried into the church, where he would constantly repeat: "Little children, love one another."

"Why do you always say the same thing?" he was asked one day.

"Because nothing else is necessary," he answered quietly, and his first letter, written surely during the last years of his life, is only an enlargement of the same theme of love.

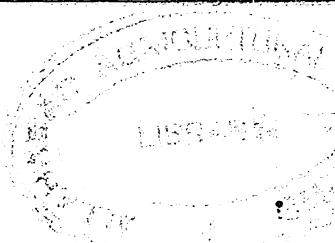
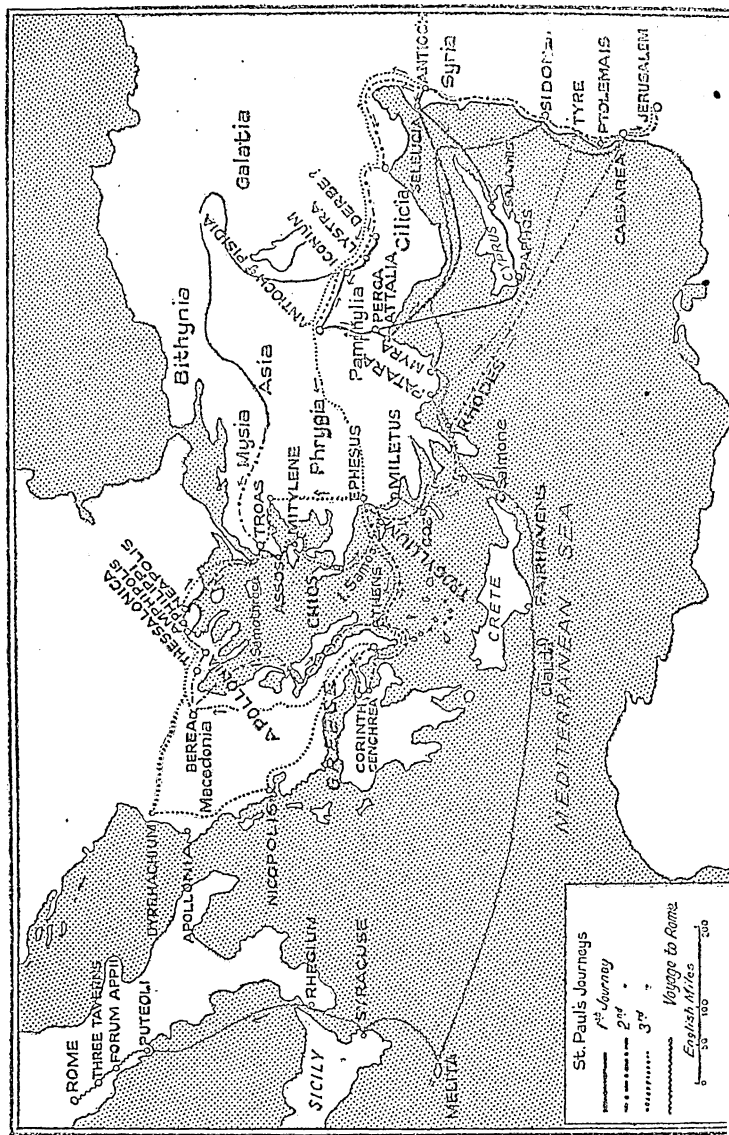
Thus we learn equally from Paul, Peter and John, though in very different language, that Christianity is personal devotion to Christ, a devotion so intense that we long to show our gratitude and adoring love by laying the only thing we have to give at His dear feet. And that is ourselves.

But love cannot rest there. It must find other expression. And how can we express love to

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Christ better than by following the Master's example, by obeying His behests, and by carrying on His work ?

“Not to acquire merit
Nor to win men's applause,
Not by our strength and wisdom
May we fulfil God's laws ;—
But in Thy might and power,
Gratefui to Thee for all,
Christ, take the gifts we bring Thee ;
Lo ! at Thy feet we fall.”



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